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# CHRIST'S SERVICE OF LOVE

## *By* HUGH BLACK, M.A.

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# Christ's Service *of* Love

BY

HUGH BLACK

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UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW YORK

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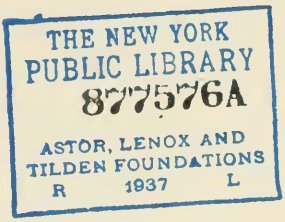


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TO MY WIFE

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# INTRODUCTION

The sermons in this book are designed for devotional reading, with some suitable lines of thought in keeping with the great occasion of Communion. I have purposely left out doctrinal discussion and controversial themes. The celebration of the Lord's Supper should be a centre of union to all Christian hearts, instead of being, as it often is, the very symbol of exclusion. In utter perversity we even use the word to represent what separates Churches from each other instead of what should really unite them; we speak of the Roman Communion, the Episcopal or Presbyterian or Baptist Communion. It is an offence. We seem to think it quite natural for a Church to draw the line here, to be willing to have other Christians worship with them and work together with them for common Christian purposes, but not to unite here where, if we truly think of it, we can alone have true union.

We have allowed the word to be used as a synonym for sectarianism, and we speak of "our Communion," meaning not the fellowship of the Christian faith but the sectional fellowship of a particular denomination. Rather, wherever else there may be division or at least separate life, it ought not to be here at the common feast which stands for the heart of hearts of our faith. Even to make the Sacrament an op-

portunity for pressing doctrinal distinctions, for insisting on a theory of atonement, is to endanger the true spiritual catholicity that the very rite ought to breathe. There is a place for specific teaching on this subject, but it ought to be somewhere else than at the Table of Remembrance. A Church may have its own particular testimony to utter, and if it likes can insist on credal affirmation, but it is unfortunate that the common meal which is the symbol of the common fellowship should be made the separating test.

Partly as a result of our false view of Communion the Sacrament has lost its true place in the Church. At any rate it is a fact that in many Churches in America and England it has become merely an occasional appendage to public worship, where a few faithful people remain behind to do this in remembrance of Jesus. The ordinary service is conducted and a sermon preached with no reference to what is to follow, the congregation is dismissed, and often only a tithe of the worshippers is left for a few minutes to break the bread and pass the cup. No doubt it is to some extent the swing of the pendulum from the false solemnity and even the superstitious celebration of the old Communion season, but it is at least a pity that the Church to-day should lose the great instrument this Sacrament may be for the deepening of spiritual life and for giving a tone to all our religious service.

What Communion represents to the Church is,

after all, the source of devotion and the inspiration of the Christian life. Teaching on this subject should rather precede the actual celebration than accompany it. At the Table itself we want merely to have the right note struck and to have our hearts directed into the love of God. In my own early ministry I used to preach doctrinal sermons about the sacrifice of Christ on Communion occasions, but I have come to see that this is not the place for such. Indeed elaborate sermons of any sort are not needed at such times; for a Christian congregation is never more responsive and more susceptible to spiritual impression than when it comes to keep the feast.

Of course it is possible to exaggerate the place of this rite and to assume that some magical virtue lies in partaking. There is nothing here that is not in the Gospel itself, nothing new added to the Gospel, nothing exceptional, nothing surprising beyond the ever-new surprise of the Father's love. It expresses in simple action what the pulpit declares in words. At the same time if we minimise the occasion of Communion, we are throwing away a great opportunity for recalling ourselves to the central truths, and are also depriving ourselves of the comfort and strength which come from realising our union with the Communion of the Saints.

There are various aspects of the Sacrament worth emphasising and in the due proportion of these lies safety. First of all it is a *Celebration,* a memorial rite, "this do in remembrance of Me." We are ac-

customed to this thought of recalling a man or event to memory. The world has its anniversaries and centenaries, its memorial celebrations when we call to recollection things in the past which the world would be poorer to have missed and be poorer even to forget. Similarly, the Church had the natural and useful custom which produced the Saints' Days, begun as anniversaries of their death, till the whole Christian year was portioned out in memory of those who had lived in God's faith and fear. This Sacrament in this particular aspect is specially a memorial of Christ's death. It is a significant dramatic representation to our own hearts "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The symbolic actions are specially designed for this end, to call to memory and to vivid consciousness this particular thing—the broken bread, the poured out wine. Some Churches by their methods of celebrating have emphasised this aspect, making it solemn by its very infrequency. So the season became a time for self-examination, for renewing of vows, for repentance and endeavour after new obedience. In Scotland until recently this aspect of Celebration was the one almost exclusively emphasised. A season of Communion was observed once or twice every year extending about a week, with Fast-days and Services of Preparation. The custom in the time of its vitality was very useful in deepening religious impression in the whole community, and to some extent served a similar function to that of Lent in some

other countries. This aspect of Celebration was in many cases exaggerated to the detriment of some deeper things, but we ought not to neglect it. The very symbols suggest it and make it an object-lesson, a miniature drama of salvation presented to the eye. These symbols are outward and visible signs, mutely preaching to us the eternal love of God our Father.

The next great thought, which undue consideration of the first sometimes obscured, is the simple thought of *Communion.* This is the inward and spiritual grace signified in the rite. It is no formal ceremony this that we do in memory of Jesus. It is more than a memorial rite, more than Celebration, it is Communion. It is not merely going back in memory to historical fact, but also it is personal appropriation of the real spiritual presence, entering into the real mystical union, accepting humbly for our soul's life the love of God in Christ. Thus the Sacrament may truly be a means of grace. The Father's love is not only set before us as an object of history for admiration and example, but it is *offered* to us in this simple dramatic way. It is presented to us, to be taken by us and applied to our own sorrows and sins and needs. We come not only to remember Him but to be blessed by Him, to bathe our hearts in His love, to nourish our souls, to taste forgiveness and reconcilement and peace with God, to be strengthened in our pilgrim life, to grow in grace in the sunshine of His presence, and to plight our troth to Him, once more renew our vows to follow and serve

Him and keep His commandments, and love Him who so loved us.

It is further a great act of Thanksgiving, *Eucharist,* a sacrifice of praise which we offer. In all the accounts of the institution of the Sacrament in the New Testament there is a blessing or thanksgiving. The term Eucharist was the earliest name used by the Church, not merely because Christ gave thanks at the last Supper, but because the Church felt that in the rite were symbolised all the benefits for which we ought to give thanks. It is the culmination of all the goodness and lovingkindness of the Lord. We thank God for His unspeakable gift, the crowning gift of His love, typical of all the good gifts of our Heavenly Father. In neglecting or minimising the Sacrament we are cutting ourselves off from participating in what has ever been the great act of the Church's thanksgiving.

In this function of common praise there is expressed also a note of the Church, which the Sacrament itself represents, namely, *Unity* amid all diversity of operation, of gifts, of function, and place. The sign and seal of the Communion of the Saints is this Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This has ever united the Church of all ages, an unbroken chain of memorial rite, pointing to the Source of this union. It is because we have one Lord that we have one Church. United to Him, we are united to all His. He is the centre of the circle, and all within the sweep of His love are in Him and in each other. We

sigh for unity—we *have* it, if we would live in the thought and power of Communion, the unity of the Spirit. This simple thought brings comfort and strength, that we are not isolated in our endeavours after the Christian life, not exceptional in our struggle or sorrow or joy, but that there is a great cloud of witnesses. It is for inspiration, for example, for emulation, to realise the bond of discipleship, and to feel that we are treading where the saints have trod.

A further aspect of Communion is that it means renewed *Consecration;* for in the very act we give ourselves once more to the Christian obedience and the Christian service. The word Sacrament implies this, taken as it was from a Latin word "Sacramentum," which meant something sacred, and which afterwards was the word used for the oath of allegiance the Roman soldier took. In partaking of Communion we are dedicating all we have and are to God. It means not only consecrating what we have, but *ourselves.* What we are is of more ultimate importance than what we do, since the value of our actions is conditioned by what we are in heart and spirit. Consecration is the one and only way of serving our generation; for it uses the whole life. The consecration of gifts is involved in the consecration of self. It is the leaven that leavens the whole lump of life. We cannot afford to lose the opportunity offered by this Sacrament for confessing our discipleship of Jesus, and for consecrating ourselves to the service of His kingdom on earth.

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here."
Love said, "You shall be he."
"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee."
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord; but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve."
"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"
"My dear, then I will serve."
"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."
So I did sit and eat.

—George Herbert.

# I

## CHRIST'S SERVICE OF LOVE: A MEDITATION BEFORE COMMUNION

*The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.*
—St. Matthew xx. 28.

This is usually, and rightly, taken as a lesson to us to follow our Lord's example, to judge our own lives by the amount of service they contain. The disciples were indignant at what they thought the presumption of two of their number who had advanced special claims to honour in the Kingdom. The imagination of them all was heated by the thought of sitting on thrones and bearing sway of some kind and attaining to honour. The Master taught them the profound lesson that the way to real spiritual greatness is by service. It seemed an inversion of the ordinary rule by which princes exercise dominion, and the world's great men exercise authority. For here it is the opposite, "whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister, and whosoever

will be chief among you let him be your servant." He takes Himself as an illustration of the law, for even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister. The lesson is that we should follow in His steps, and make our religion not merely a getting but a giving, the service of Christ and of the brethren.

But there is another side of religion, suggested even by these words of our text, though not on the surface. It is that the Son of Man came not that we might minister to Him, but that He might minister to us, and this should be in our minds as we come to keep the feast. There is much that we can do for Christ; and the Christian life in its practical aspect is much concerned with Christian duty and Christian service. We have to carry on His work, commend His Gospel, fill up even His sufferings as St. Paul declared. We have to show His love by the love of our lives. When on earth He submitted to be ministered unto. Men and women loved Him in the days of His pilgrimage and tended Him. Martha and other holy women sometimes cumbered themselves with much serving of Him, and found delight in doing it. He accepted hospitality, went out to the little home in Bethany, where He would rest and be served. Peter would be proud to wash His

feet. The disciples would minister to Him when and where they could. Loving women went to His sepulchre to anoint His body, and give it the last sweet ministrations. But He did not come for all this—not to be ministered unto, but Himself to minister.

We also in our measure can minister to Him. He said that a cup of cold water to one of His little ones was given to Him. Whatever we do in His spirit for men is done for Him. Many a ministry of the Lord is possible to us. If we are His disciples we will seek to serve Him in the ways that He loved to serve. Inevitable as this is and needful as it is both for our own sake and for the sake of others, yet He did not come that we might do this for Him. He came to do something for us. It is possible for us to be so taken up with all our religious activities that we may forget to wait to let Christ do His work upon ourselves. Our Communion season comes to us, calling a halt, reminding us that it is true for us also, as for the disciples of old, that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister. It is good to cease from serving sometimes, and let Christ serve us.

This is one of the chief lessons of our holy Communion. We are not hosts here at all, taking charge

and dispensing benefits. We come as guests simply. We bring nothing to the feast except need, nothing except hunger and thirst after righteousness. We do not make the provision: we only come to partake. He is the Giver and the Gift. He prepares the feast, invites us all unworthy, omits not one gracious act of courtesy, breaks the bread, gives us the wine of His love. The Son of Man came to minister, let Him minister. It is His pleasure to serve, let Him serve. It is His joy to give, let Him give. We, perhaps, would like to be always serving like Martha, bustling about our little activities. There was a better part than even serving Jesus, a better part which Mary chose. After all we come to His Table not because we are worthy, not because our faith or love or strength or service gives us a warrant, but just because He asks us, and offers us His love and strength.

To some it is hard to make this submission, to own this complete dependence; as in daily life it is hard for some active men to let others do work which they themselves like doing. To some this is the hardest thing to bear in times of illness and weakness. They hate being laid aside, and instead of ministering to others, having others ministering to them. To be useless, to be dependent, is the sorest item in their trouble. It is partly pride, and partly their active

habits, the unusualness of having others do for them what they used to do for themselves and for others. People who are always well, always strong, always active, have sometimes a certain hardness; and this is often one of the sweet ministries of sickness, that it teaches dependence and willingness to give up and let others bear the burden. That is why sickness so often aids faith; for faith means to be broken of our self-sufficiency and to know our need and our poverty of soul; faith is just to accept humbly and gratefully. It is to submit to the Son of Man who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. It is to confess our absolute need of Him, to depend utterly on Him, to let Him take us and feed us and save us and keep us. It is to be willing to take grace as a gift not of merit, to take peace as a gift not an attainment ("My peace I give unto you"), to take everything as a gift, to be humble and receptive and accept the ministry of the Son of Man.

There is a true Quietism, which is the heart of all Mysticism, in which a man is quiet, submissive, empty of self-will, realising that the perfect spiritual state is reached not by struggle but by submission, not by the active exercise of will but by waiting on God, that the soul is fed by constant meditation on divine things, and Communion is just opening the

heart to let Christ in to sup with us and to serve us. Not our will but His will: not our way but His way: not our work but His work: we cannot spread a feast for the Master but He furnishes our table for us, and we are content to have it so. It says in sweet humility with the Psalmist: "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child."

Is not this humble receptiveness the true mood and attitude for us at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper? It is *His* Supper. We have no place there, except as those who need and who come at His gracious invitation to accept. In Communion we celebrate nothing in us, but all in Him. We are not celebrating our faith or constancy or love, but His. Christ's love does not depend on our faith, but our faith depends on His love. Our service depends on His love, also. We need to feed our faith there if we are to serve Him at all. "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me." The way to serve is to be a disciple: to sit at His feet, to learn of Him, to submit to Him. Before we can do His work we must drink of His spirit and let Him teach us His secret. Before we can serve Him we must be humble enough to let Him serve us. "Behold," said Thomas à Kempis, "all things are Thine which I have and whereby I serve

Thee. And yet contrariwise Thou rather servest me than I Thee."

This is the root of our faith, the source of our strength, and the very heart of our Communion: namely, that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister. There are other aspects of religion, the fight of faith, the witness to the truth, Christian duties, Christian service, and the whole issue in practice of Christian love, but this first, and this last also, and this all the time, that our spiritual life depends utterly on Christ. The bread and the wine are symbols of this dependence; for they are symbols of His love. Creep close to the warmth of His love: get near to the source of all your peace and joy and service. Let the Son of Man minister to you, serve you with His own sweet courtesy.

There will not
One loving usage be forgot
By Thee; Thy kiss will greet
Us entering; Thou wilt not disdain
To wash away each guilty stain
From off our soilèd feet.
We enter; from this time to prove
Thy hospitality and love
Shewn towards the meanest guest.

## II

## CHRISTIAN OPTIMISM

"*The Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks He brake it.*—1 CORINTHIANS xi. 23.

THAT night in which Jesus was betrayed seems the climax of human sin, the culmination of all the evil in the world and in man. It reads like the absolute and irrevocable condemnation of human nature. What have we to say about ourselves when such a situation was possible? If ever good entered the world in the unearthly beauty of holiness and the sublime tenderness of love, it did so in the presence of Jesus among men. His life could be summed up in the sentence, "He went about doing good": His words were full of heavenly music: by speech and deed He revealed God as One whose desire was towards men. The gentleness and compassion and sweet grace and stainless purity of this Man might well give others who saw Him new hope for humanity; and, as a matter of fact, true hearts were drawn

out to Him in love and hope. Never man spake like this Man; never man lived like Him. And this was the end! Malice and hatred and evil passion inflamed the men in authority: only indifference, or the light regard that is easily swayed either for or against, marked the attitude of the mass of the people; and in the inner circle of friends there were weakness and cowardice and treachery.

It was the night of the betrayal, when enemies without and the false friend within found their victim, when love and truth and goodness were engulfed by evil, when hell had its highest triumph. Human sin seemed too strong for divine goodness. If goodness is here thus utterly overthrown, what hope for it elsewhere? It was a pitched battle between the forces of moral good and evil, and there seemed no doubt as to which side could claim the victory. Is it that good is in essential nature weaker than evil, as the prophet's prevision of such a case implies: "He made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death, *because* he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth"? Must good be ever thus defeated, prematurely cut off out of the land of the living? Are they that be against such a life more than they that be for it?

It is no idle speculation this. It concerns us vitally. It affects our whole view of God and the universe and life and human nature itself. What are we to think of our prospects as a race, if this triumph of evil represents history and destiny? Must we despair that good can ever be the final goal of ill? The whole complexion of thought and character and life will ultimately be determined by the answer we give; and it is unworthy of us to give a blind answer, a conclusion that has no grounds of fact on which it can securely rest. The blind answer is common enough, the conclusion which refuses to consider all the facts. Such answers have even been elevated into rival systems of philosophy.

On the one side there is a shallow optimism which gaily goes on its way both in theorising and in living, shutting its eyes to the existence of this dread conflict between good and evil. It ignores sin altogether. It arrives at a pleasant conclusion by eliminating the dark facts of history and experience. In all the varied forms of theory in which this mood clothes itself, the one thing found in them all is that it treats sin not as a reality, but if it is anything at all it is only as the shadow cast by light. In writers like Emerson, and sometimes even Browning, in their cheerful optimism we feel this lack of reality, we

feel that their hopefulness has most of its being from their own happy temperament. When Emerson says that "the carrion in the sun will convert itself to grass and flowers, and man though in brothels or gaols or on gibbets is on his way to all that is good and true," or in another Essay, that "the league between virtue and nature engages all things to assume a hostile front to vice"; or when Browning sings, "The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound," or that "All's right with the world"; while we acknowledge with gratitude the strength and comfort such brave words sometimes give us, we feel that they are glossing over the evidence on the other side, and are not taking a serious view enough of the deadly fact of sin.

Others, who write not as poets but from the point of view of science, also practically ignore sin, and treat it slightingly, either as some petty human infirmity or as a necessity of human nature. Though at first sight this looks a very convenient and pleasant attitude, as if we might take a bright and cheerful view of ourselves, in essence it is a degradation of man; for it really denies us moral freedom, denies that we are responsible beings. It naturally also makes light of redemption; for if there is no real moral evil, there is no need of redemption. It turns

the work of Christ into a farce, an idle spectacle, if not a complete mistake; and this same night, when Jesus was betrayed, has no significance. Such a blind answer as this shallow optimism to our problem about the conflict of good and evil cannot help us; for it only answers by asserting that there is no problem.

On the opposite extreme there is the answer of pessimism, which has far more affinity with the Christian position; for it at least acknowledges some of the facts. It sees all the wrong and sin and shame and misery of earth back to the dawn of history, all the cruelty and agony up till now with which the whole creation groaneth and travaileth; and it sees nothing but evil. It declares that the world is hopelessly and incurably evil. It is an answer of despair, and at the best can only counsel acquiescence in the inevitable; for it takes the heart out of all effort after reformation and improvement. If it looked at this scene of the betrayal night, it would simply say, What else would you expect? That is just as it has always been and will always be. It is only another evidence of the inherent evil of the world. We have said that the Christian view has much in common with this; for they both accept the facts, the hideous evils that surround and menace life. They both have a con-

tempt for the superficial optimism which neglects the dark facts, the forces of evil in the world, the facts of human weakness and sin, the pollution and ruin, and corruption that is in the world through lust.

But hereafter they separate company. Christianity no more denies the existence of good than the existence of evil; and it believes with all its soul that ultimately good will overcome evil. It looks upon the world as an arena of struggle, of fierce moral warfare between good and evil. It looks for peace, not by evading the power of evil but by laying it low on the stricken field. This sublime faith is reached, not by careful balancing of facts on either side and striking an average, but by faith in God, in His will and His love. It takes courage from the attitude of Christ on this very crisis, as well as through all His life and teaching. If any might despair as He went out to His divine task of redemption surely our Lord might. For the small beginnings of the Kingdom He had but a little patch of ground prepared for a handful of seed—ground poor at the best as the world counts best; some of it stony where the birds of the air could swoop down and make the sowing vain; some of it overrun with weeds which would choke the seed. The short day of His ministry was near the night, and there was left for His great purposes a

feeble company of disciples, not influential nor learned. Can they be relied on when the Master is taken? What chance has Christ's cause against the might of Rome and all the allied powers of evil? The disciples! Why, in the critical moment one betrayed Him, another denied Him, and all forsook Him and fled. If ever despair seemed justified it was here.

Yet, in the face of all the evil around, and the weakness at the heart of the cause, Jesus showed the old stedfast courage and faith which never left Him. He did not falter and turn back at the terrible sight of evil, which reached its climax that betrayal night. Our Lord's optimism took all that into account, all that the direst pessimism could suggest—and more; for sin had a darker aspect to Him than ever it could have to us. None ever spoke with such pain and sorrow and condemnation of the evil deeds and words and thoughts that maim life. He knew what was in man, knew the malice and passion and prejudice of foes, knew the possibilities of cowardice and weakness and treachery of friends. On that night of betrayal He read the traitor's heart in the traitor's eye. He saw the cross all the way to the cross. Its shadow lay athwart His path. When He met the disciples that night in the upper chamber at the love-

feast, He knew that the same night He was being betrayed.

There is in His calm confident words no suggestion of failure. He is sure of the future, sure that love is stronger than hate, and good mightier than evil, and the Kingdom of Heaven the one eternal reality of the universe. He is sure of that because He is sure of God. He goes on legislating for the future of His Church, calmly telling His disciples what they are to do in memory of Him. Our Lord's attitude that night He was betrayed was not merely the spasm of courage with which many a man will brace himself up in face of a supreme crisis. It is consistent with all His previous life and teaching. He never took the gloomy despairing view of human nature common with our picturesque pessimists. He believed in men because He believed in man, believed in the divine possibilities of his nature. He saw past the flaws and surface distortions, and recognised him as made in the image of God, however much that image had been despoiled. Where others saw despair, He saw hope. Classes that others gave up as hopeless, He called to their high vocation as sons of God. He believed in the progress of good and its ultimate triumph. He taught that the Kingdom of Heaven was like leaven that would yet leaven

the whole lump, or as a mustard seed that would grow to the greatest of trees.

The Christian view, therefore, looks to a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. We believe in the love of God, in His beneficent will, in His purpose to redeem. It inspires the Church to watch and pray and labour and suffer and wait. Such a faith is the soul of every progress, of every consecrated life, of every high duty, and of every noble passion. It is a fountain of hope and of endeavour. Even where sin is seen to abound (and to what eye is sin so sinful as the Christian eye?), grace is seen much more to abound. Where evil is seen scattering ruin and desolation, God is seen working out His redemptive purpose. The cross of Christ is the pledge and the promise of this. Hope, and faith, and love grow from that blessed tree. How can we lose faith or hope or love, so long as we remember that same night when Jesus was betrayed and yet showed His Kingship?

That betrayal night was the climax of human sin; but it was also the climax of some other things of even more importance. Who can tell what was in Judas's heart, the jealousy or wounded ambition or covetousness? For three years he had been in the

little company, shared the difficulties and triumphs, hopes and fears, received the teaching, joined in the prayers, and this was the end, a lost soul, given over to hatred! The same night in which He was betrayed, "the devil having put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him, Jesus took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet"—the feet of Judas also! *That* was the answer to the evil that surged in the dark heart. That was the divine answer to the hatred that seemed to succeed. The climax of sin was the climax of love. When evil was at its worst, good was at its best. They were there in the same room on the same night, the highest beside the lowest. When hate broke out in passion, love—love triumphant—held her secure sway. Did not the best overcome the worst after all, in spite of appearances? Witness that scene when the Master stooped to wash their feet the same night in which He was betrayed. Who shall despair after that triumph? Who shall say that love has not the last word after all? The Lord Jesus the same night He was betrayed washed the traitor's feet.

"The Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed, gave thanks." In the assurance of ulti-

mate triumph, the certainty that His work was finished, He gave thanks. For Himself and for His little ones who believed and should believe on Him, He gave thanks. That His Father in Heaven had led Him and brought Him up to this last step, He gave thanks. He beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven, and knew that His work was accepted and would go on to the final triumph. The climax of sin was also the climax of faith as well as of love. Faith found its assurance in God's redeeming love, and our Lord in His seeming defeat knew that the old word would be fulfilled, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away all tears from off all faces."

"The Lord Jesus the same night He was betrayed took bread, and brake it, and said: Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you." The night of the betrayal was the night of the redemption. When hell raged, heaven was opened. When the despair of men seemed fixed, the hope of man arose. The way of sorrow led out to the way of salvation. We know that "our redemption draweth nigh." The climax of sin was the climax of hope also. Love, faith, and hope, for us also as for our Lord, came to us from the same night in which He was betrayed. We

feed our souls from the same source this day as we sit at the Table and remember all that happened the same night in which He was betrayed.

Shall it again be that any who take the broken bread shall betray or deny or forsake Him, and keep back the triumph of good? Shall we hinder instead of help the world in its steep ascent to God? Under which King, to which rival dominion, shall we give our lives?

## III

## THE CURE FOR CARE

*In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul.*—Psalm xciv. 19.

This psalm is a cry for help against the insolence and cruelty of Israel's oppressors, evidently at a time when the nation has been under the heel of heathen conquerors. It begins with an appeal to God as the righteous Judge to put an end to the tyranny of wicked rulers who crush the weak and "break in pieces Thy people, O Lord." It passes from a cry to God into an appeal to the people, reminding them of the argument for faith, an argument all the greater because of their dire necessity. God is not indifferent, nor ignorant. He who planted the ear hears, and He who formed the eye sees. He knows at once the arrogant inhumanity of the oppressors, and the sorrows of His people. For the one there is a day of retribution; for the other a day of redemption. There is a divine purpose to be wrought out through all the struggle and the sorrow, a purpose of moral discipline and a purpose of supreme love. "The

Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance." There is no help for them but in God against their blood-thirsty tyrants, but it is much for them to realise that in the deepest straits and the darkest passes of life there is unfailing help in God. It is everything to know that He stands by their side; and faith sees not only that God will deliver them in the future, but that He has been with them even through all their sore trial.

The Psalmist quietens his soul by his comforting faith. With spiritual insight he sees something of the meaning of discipline, and sees the hand of God in the dark passage through the cloud as well as in the brightness of the ultimate deliverance. In the terror and despair of the crushing affliction he may ask as though there were no answer, "Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?" But he sees as in a flash, that all the time, even in the climax of the sorrow, God has been more than standing up for him, has been standing with him, has been actually by his side. He sees that if the Lord had not been his help all would have been ended long since. "When I said, my foot hath slipped, Thy mercy, O Lord, was holding me up." It is a vivid figure of compassing grace.

In the very crisis when all seemed over and he gave himself up for lost, when he felt that at last all was gone, when he said "my foot hath slipped," he discovered that love had gripped him and was holding him all the time. Amid wickedness, rampant and triumphant, enmity without and trouble within, he entered into peace through the assurance of God's presence. In the multitude of my thoughts (doubts, distracting cares, the tumult of heart and brain), Thy comforts delight my soul. There is a refuge from all the storms of life, a place of repair, where the soul gathers strength. When fearful thoughts and sorrowful cares crowd upon the mind and jostle each other like following waves to engulf the soul, there is sweet solace and comforting peace in simple faith in God.

Times alter and circumstances change, but the essentials of life remain, and this cry of a wounded heart is the human cry and we can interpret the psalm for our own individual needs and personal situation. The way to peace for us to-day, as in this echo of a long-past time, is in the assurance of God. This is the one need of man's heart. We do not realise what it is for a human soul to become sure of God. It is the great discovery which changes the world. We are set in the midst of strife and

perplexity, but worse than the tumult outside is the tumult within. Cares and doubts and fears seem set in the midst of us. There can be no abiding consolation and no complete solution of the riddle of life, no safe refuge, except somewhere within where the soul can find rest. If life is meaningless, empty of any spiritual purpose, the world is a place of despair as much to us as the terrible situation depicted by the Psalmist of old. We, like him, and as much as him, need the comfort of God's love for the multitude of our cares.

What cares these are, and what a multitude of them! Who can number them, or classify them exhaustively? The old hag, Care, sits close behind the rider, and goes with him where he goes and will not be shaken off. There are *personal* cares: for example, the pressure of necessities, the troubles and anxieties, disappointments and unfulfilments, pain of body, distress of mind, grief of heart, sorrow of soul. It is a world of strife, a world of loss, a world of sin; and who can give name to the multitude of thoughts and cares bred by strife and loss and sin? Sorer, perhaps, than personal cares are some of the cares *for others* which oppress many a heart. A father toils in weakening strength with haunting fears of what the future will bring to those

he loves best when strength at last gives out. A mother waits in tears for the footfall of a son, with dread for his coming, or greater dread that he come not. We can fill up many a story from such vague hints of the outlines.

There is nothing the heart of man needs more than a message of courage and hope and confidence. And where is such a message possible except as a message of faith? We might learn indifference or callousness by other means. We might learn to lay down our arms and give up the burden of care by some counsel of despair. But there is no comfort in any real sense except in a message of faith. Only as we learn to trust in God's love and become sure of His loving purpose can we gather true comfort. And this is one of the deep meanings of to-day's sacrament. It means that we are not alone, that God loves us and has supplies for our human need. When we think of our necessities we may well wonder that we do not come eagerly to the unfailing source of supply. What need there is for a message of comfort and hope to all of us in this great pilgrimage of life! It is a sad and sorrowful world in spite of all the gleams of sunshine and happiness that come our way. We are living thoughtless lives if the situation of this psalm have no sort of application for

our modern days. We may not know the grinding of the oppressor's heel as Israel knew it then, and taste of the arrogance and injustice of the strong, and have to watch with helpless hand the cruelty of lawlessness when the widow and the stranger and the orphan are wronged as the Psalmist with hot heart had to watch, but we have blind eye and sealed ear and shut heart if we have not learned pity for the fathomless pathos of human life. We may not, like the Psalmist, have tottered at the edge of the abyss and felt that our foot had slipped, but we have lived a shallow life if we have never learned that the abyss is there for us all. We may not, like him, be overwhelmed with distracting thoughts and perplexing doubts and nameless fears, but if we pass it by as a poem of an olden time picturing evil that has no counterpart to-day, we are living in a fool's paradise.

The world is built as if for discipline, and its one need is comfort of some sort. There is so much pain and sorrow and tears, so much darkness and weakness and sin, so much unrest and dispeace and distress. There is sorrow on the sea as it moans and breaks on the shores of life. And if we will but look resolutely at ourselves, what life does not know its troubles without and fears within, its dark

moments, its difficult passes, its dangers and distresses? Men live in the shadow, oppressed with care and anxiety, burdened with loads too heavy, harassed with fears and doubts. There are many lonely lives, and tempted lives, and hearts that have said good-bye to happiness, and souls of men that are full of bitterness and despair. "In the multitude of my distracting cares within me," is not that a description which in some form or other will fit many a case?

And for every such and all such there is no other permanent refuge, no other abiding comfort, except faith in God's eternal love. When the black clouds drift across the sky and the storms beat upon the house of life, what chance for safety if it be not founded upon that rock? What chance for peace if we do not live above the flood-mark of the deep? There is no true argument against care except the argument for faith. Our Lord based all His teaching on this argument pointing ever to the Father's love, and Himself walked with sure tread and drank the cup of human life and tasted what it is for a man to die, with His heart fixed on God, with the divine comforts delighting His soul. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid, *believe*," He said. The only cure for care is the cure of faith. This is the comfort that balances the care. And

this is why our Christian faith has a message to a sad and sorrowful world, a message of hope and comfort and peace so that the believer to-day can take into his mouth with deeper assurance the words of the afflicted Psalmist, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul."

It does not mean that trial is taken away, that life now loses its discipline. Nay, the cares and troubles and fears have still to be met, but the sting of them is cured. Pain there still is, loss still comes, difficulties still arise, they may come in their multitude, but in the midst of them there are comforts that help us to bear them and even delight the soul. There is a place of central peace, a spot of rest amid whirling circumstance. All things are bearable to the man who believes. He sucks comfort from every condition and tastes delight in the midst of care.

What is this faith which has such magical power? It simply means to fall back upon God, to trust to His love and live in the secret of His presence. Every new adventure, every fresh trial, every surmounted difficulty becomes a new argument for faith. When I said, My foot hath slipped this time, and everything is lost at last, Thy love, O Lord, never let me go but all the time had firm grip of me. Looking back you see it has been so

When through the slippery paths of youth
With heedless steps I ran,
Thine arm unseen conveyed me safe
And led me up to man.

We learn to cast our care upon God when we know that He cares for us, and this is the meaning of our Communion. It has many a message and many a lesson, but its deepest message and sweetest lesson is that of comfort. The whole symbolism of the service speaks of comfort, the table of his love, the feast, the bread and the wine, the gracious Host who spreads the table for us. It all means love, sleepless, deathless love. If, as we saw, the one remedy for care is to be sure of God's love, has not this made us sure? Did we not say as we took our portion from His hand, "Thy comforts delight my soul"? We came with cares, with doubts, and fears and distracting thoughts and perplexing troubles; or we came with sorrow and a sense of loss, but care could not live there in that comforting presence. The deepest lesson of Holy Communion, however we interpret it, is the Real Presence of Christ. What trouble or distress is there in life that will not be dissipated by the light of that faith?

But the season of Communion will have failed for us, if we do not make it more than a blessed season with a glimpse into the central peace, if we do not

make it a type of what every season should be, a symbol of what all life should become, a *state* of Communion, enjoying the comfort of peace and joy at all times. The remedy for care is to know the love of God in Christ, and that remedy is open to us not fitfully and casually, but always and everywhere. The divine comforts which delight the soul are not merely the comfort of hope hereafter, but the comfort of Communion now, realising God's love at every turn of the road and walking with Him through this great wilderness. Trouble and pain and sorrow and loss are still facts of life; we have to meet them as all flesh must. We must quiver at the sting of death and be trampled down by the grave's victory, but we go not alone, and even in the valley of the shadow of death we need fear no evil. The Christian may even have a Gethsemane as his Master had, but like his Master he will find angels in the garden. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul."

## IV

## THE SOURCE AND ISSUE OF COMFORT

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*—2 Corinthians i. 3-4.

There is no real comfort in the Bible sense apart from faith. Time may mitigate or assuage or harden, the world may make us forget, life may distract, work may fill up the gap, friends may cheer and support, but only God can comfort. It is always so in the Bible. The divine comfort is the only comfort worth speaking of. "Let Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort," prayed the Psalmist. The unfailing source of comfort in both the Old and the New Testaments is the divine presence. "Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father which loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope, through grace comfort your hearts and stablish them in every good work and word," is Paul's desire for the Thessalonians. "The God of all comfort," is His designa-

tion, from whom alone can consolation come. It is only a man's faith can cut deep down to the roots of his life. His life follows the fortunes of his faith. Our faith settles everything, even the quality of our possible comfort. Of course, when we speak of faith we mean something more than opinion or ordinary belief. It is the very spirit a man is of, the spirit that transfuses his personality. God's highest purpose with us is not that we should possess but that we should *become*, not even that we should believe but that we should *be*. His end for us is character. Our only true creed is found there in that subtle region, the creed by which we live. All our struggles, intellectual and moral, all our afflictions and trials, have their practical justification in their effect on what we are.

This is why there never was an emptier and more ignorant phrase than the common one that it does not matter what a man believes. It matters intensely what a man believes for the simple reason that the whole of life is coloured by what the faith is. Does it make no difference, for example, whether a man believes in a God who is a devil, or in no God at all, or in the God of St. Paul, "even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort"? Does it make no difference

that a man should believe in God's purpose with this world? And does it make no difference that a man should believe, regarding himself, in a personal relationship with that God and in a life of service and love born of that relation? Your faith regarding these three cardinal subjects as to God, the world, and self, interpenetrates your life, into every nook and cranny of its extent. It colours all that is yours, for it colours you. In our text we get insight into St. Paul's vital faith, and we get some indication of that view of God, the world, and self, which is distinctively Christian, that faith which if a man believes, makes his life Christian.

(1) Faith, then, in the first instance, has to do with God. It is not merely to believe that God is which constitutes faith. You must be sure of something that you mean by God; you must believe something regarding His nature and purpose and His desire with you and for you. Your life will be as your faith is—must be. If God be to you, as to the man of the parable, as an hard man reaping where He has not sown and gathering where He has not strawed, what can you be but afraid, and what can you do but go and hide your talent in the earth? That is the inevitable conclusion. If there be nothing above you but a dark overmastering dread, and noth-

ing before you but a blank despair, what can you expect to be and to do? Or, if you try to cozen yourself into the belief that there is no God, nothing but blind chance or blinder fate, the present loses its divine purpose for you and the future loses its divine hope. Destiny without God is a riddle: history without God is a tragedy. But if God be to you what He was to St. Paul, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort," does not life assume a new complexion? If you believe—not accept theoretically but believe in your heart of hearts, grasp as the fundamental fact of existence for you—if you believe in a God whom you can so describe with these words of St. Paul, what can you say, but thankfully, adoringly say, "Blessed be God"? What does it matter what a man believes about God? the world says. Nothing else matters. All else by comparison is a thing of indifference.

All the Christian facts are the filling up of this character of God, describing His nature, revealing His purpose, telling us what He is, convincing us of His love, bringing home to us the assurance that God is our Heavenly Father, with a heart of love for us, giving us eternal comfort and good hope through grace. All the gracious things of the Gospel are

tokens and promises that it is so; and to have a faith in God like that of St. Paul instead of being a thing of no moment, is the one thing of supremest importance to a human soul. Everything else follows from our attitude here. Not only our life, but also all our other faith, follows the fortunes of this faith.

(2) Thus, faith does not end with giving a particular view of God; it goes on to enunciate corresponding views of the other two important subjects, self and the world. If faith had not a relation to *self* touching closely the personal and most intimate life, unbelief would be justified in pronouncing it of little moment. But the Christian personal experience goes alongside of and keeps step with the higher faith in the person and nature of God. You cannot believe in the kind of God St. Paul describes without going further. Such a faith cannot be kept away from you at a respectable distance, to be viewed as an interesting theological speculation. It comes near you a faith like this, touches you at every point, becomes part of you. It is vital, palpitating with living interest for you all along the line of life. God cannot be a God like that—with a heart of love, the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort—without your entering into personal relationship with Him.

If it is real faith it must work itself out in detail. Your life with its light and its shadows, with its fulfilments and its disappointments, with its pleasures and its pains, is all permeated and pervaded by your knowledge of the love of God. You make it yours. You appropriate it to your own case till you get the personal comfort that lies in the bosom of that comforting faith. It affects your view of self and of all self's happenings. The past, be it never so full of sorrow, is glorified by that love; the present, be it never so hard and bitter, is comforted by that love; the future, be it never so darkened by lowering clouds, is assured by that love. Not only can you say, "Blessed be God" and such a God, describing Him with all the Christian description as the God of all comfort; but also you can say, "Blessed be God who hath comforted *me* in all my affliction." Your general faith works itself out in experience, and your experience proves and guarantees your faith. You are tasting comfort from its unfailing source, and you know that God is standing near you comforting your heart and establishing you in all good. You begin to be sure of it. You are getting more sure of it every day of your lives. And, oh, to be sure of it is to have solved the problem. To be able to say what St. Paul said is to have gained

the victory of the ages, and to have the sting taken even from death.

Let us bring this great argument home to ourselves and face the complete situation. Have we this faith and experience? Have we this grip on the living God, which turns rough to smooth and bitter to sweet—strange alchemy! When the possibility is presented to me, if I had to give up what my soul loves best, if I were to be struck down with palsied strength and hang a broken limb on the tree of life, if the future had no more hope as I have been counting hope, and the present no more joy as my heart spells joy, could I meekly say, "Blessed"? Let this cup pass from me. Nay, I cannot, I will not, it is too much. When I look with stricken eyes at the worst, I cannot bless God, who has the ordering of all my life, that He should have led me there, the God who is the overmastering Providence of my every step, the dark Fate that has set to me my weird. I may suffer if I must, but I will not bless. But (listen, oh my soul!) of God—not that God, but this—"the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" with all the depth of meaning in that phrase, the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort,—nay, the God who hath comforted me in all affliction (oh, my soul, remember the times and

the places), can I not say, "Blessed"? Though Thou slay me, yet will I bless Thee.

Some of your lives have been hard and full of striving and sorrow; even the smiling faces are sometimes veils over many an ache and void of heart. How hard your lives are only your own hearts fully know. But if to-day you are able to say, with sad reservation because you are weak, with doubtful faltering lip because so much is dark, but yet do say, "blessed be God who hath comforted me," it is good to be able to say that. There we are at the source of eternal comfort and good hope, for we are at the source of grace. It is the comfort of a love that triumphs over sorrow, and the hope that outlives death.

(3) But faith has always a relation to the *world* as well as a relation to God and self. God's dealing with a particular man is not an end in itself, but designed for a larger end for which the particular man is used. St. Paul saw this fully and, therefore, his life has been the wonder of Christian history. The moral and spiritual ends involved in salvation can only be secured by the working of God's love through loving men. St. Paul blessed God for the personal comfort he had received in his affliction, but he saw beyond that to the great wide purpose

in the heart of God. He saw himself to be not an end but an instrument. He blessed God not so much for the personal comfort as because through the personal comfort he was enabled to continue the work to which he had given his life. Most of us never see much beyond ourselves. We hedge ourselves in within our own borders. We desire the sunshine for ourselves, and it may be bless God for every ray of it. But we do not always understand the object of God's love and comfort, that for which He gives us it. We do not always see that we are blessed in order that we may bless, comforted that we may comfort, and get that we may give. Sometimes we would open ourselves up on the side of God to receive, and shut ourselves up on the side of men to give. We are even jealous of the love of God—what a strange distortion all exclusiveness here means! In the effort to keep all to self we lose much and sometimes lose all. We try to imprison a sunbeam, but when we shut the door and windows of our hearts on it we find it has evaded us and escaped. Can we wonder that our hearts are so often barren of comfort? How clearly St. Paul learned the lesson of the life of Christ when he summed up the philosophy of God's providence thus, "Blessed be God who hath comforted us in all our affliction *that* we may

be able to comfort them that are in any affliction by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

The school of affliction is a school of comfort, and the school of comfort is a school of sympathy. A man will sometimes learn in some vague way why he has tasted discipline, and yet may not have gone further to learn why he has tasted consolation. If we can say, and all of us in some form can say, "Blessed be God who hath comforted us," can we continue, "that we may be able to comfort others"? There is no election which picks out candidates for a sluggard's paradise. God's election is not merely to privilege but also to service; and every right we possess is also a duty. What have you of eternal comfort and good hope that is not through grace? What have you that you have not received? And why did you receive it? We speak glibly of the value of experience, that tribulation should beget patience and the virtues of the spirit. But tribulation often hardens us, and even comfort sometimes hardens us into selfishness. The very Christian graces are often coloured and spoiled by some selfishness. Our patience is but sullen waiting; our faith is the despair of light; our love is the burnt-out passion of our heart; our service the dregs of our life. Let us get rid of

the taint of self, and our work will be the nobler and our worship the purer. Then the true joy of service will be ours, and the meaning of Christ's sacrifice will be brought home to us in any little sacrifice we are privileged to make for others and for Him. The world waits for service: Christ calls to service. Often we are blind to God's ministry of comfort to us, but oftener still we are blind to our ministry of comfort from Him to others. The opportunities lie scattered at the feet of men like flowers. The occasions are numberless to the chastened and comforted heart that looks at life out of gentle eyes and touches life with soft hand.

This is the programme of Christianity. This is faith with its threefold reach from God through the individual to the world. Have you been doing injustice to this faith in your thoughts? Have you in ignorance slighted it as a small thing, whereas it covers all life and puts in motion eternal powers? Will you do justice to it now, the only possible justice, of giving up your selfish isolation, blessing God for His gifts of grace, opening your heart to His love, and serving your generation, walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost? Said Thomas à Kempis: "God has so ordained that we may learn to bear one another's burdens; for there is no man without his

burden, no man sufficient for himself; we must support, comfort, and help one another." The school of affliction has failed for us if it has not become a school of comfort; and the school of comfort has failed for us if it has not become a school of sympathy.

As we partake of the comfort of faith typified to us at the table of communion, we must let it speak its full message to heart and conscience. It has a personal message of sweet comfort from our fellowship with the Father of mercies revealed to us by Jesus. We find strength and consolation for all the needs of life, and even in affliction our faith speaks of comfort and hushes us into peace. But it has also a social message, summoning us to duty, requiring us to give of the love we have received. Personal faith must be transmuted into social service. Communion must issue in life, the larger life of Christian love. If we have been at the source of true comfort, it is that we may be able to comfort others through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

# V

## BY WAY OF REMEMBRANCE

*I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.*—2 PETER iii. 1.

AT first it looks merely like a graceful courtesy for the writer to declare that he is giving them not so much new truths as only reminding them of what they already know; just as previously in this same letter he says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them." Again and again in St. Paul's Epistles also we find marks of the same gracious courtesy, as if his readers knew the things he desired to teach them and possessed the virtues he longed them to have. In the Epistle to the Romans we are touched with this sweet humility and courtesy in the implication that all he hoped to do for them was to remind them of something they knew as well as he. "I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort,

as *putting you in mind,* because of the grace that is given to me of God."

This courtesy of the Apostle, however, in assuming previous knowledge is not mere meaningless flattery. That attitude, for one thing, is the true teacher's instinct. To assume knowledge is often the way to bring out into consciousness what is either latent or is in danger of being forgotten. It is more than a mere trick to gain the confidence of an audience by giving them a good opinion of themselves. It was really true that their readers knew the facts and conclusions they sought to bring before their notice; they had been taught in the faith; they were aware of the story of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and also of the religious import of that story. And so, as a matter of fact, what they did need was to be reminded of it, to have it impressed on conscience and heart. It bears repetition. All subsequent progress in the Christian life is attained by bringing out into thought and practice what they already know and believe. What can one do to a Christian congregation but stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance? Thus, these words are more than idle courtesy; they are the statement of a fact that, in moral living, men need to be reminded of what they know, and that only by repetition are faith and knowledge deepened.

But there is more in it than this evident truth. The words of our text suggest an even deeper thought of religion and life. We are led to look for this deeper idea when we think that all the Apostles followed this method. To take another instance, this time from St. John: "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it." In fact, the great appeal of religion seems to be an appeal to memory. In the promise of the Holy Spirit to His disciples our Lord states that the work of the Spirit to them would be "to bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

By way of remembrance is the method of religion. It is so in the life of the Church at large. A revival of religion comes when the Church is recalled to the facts and forces that underlie her very existence. A revival comes not by novel doctrines of a novel creed, but by a firmer grasp of the things that cannot be shaken, a recovery of faith in God and Jesus Christ and the human soul and eternal life. It is when the Church is stirred by way of remembrance that new life seems poured through her veins. Every religious advance is got by a return, as the advancing tide falls back on the basic bosom of the sea to prepare itself for an increased sweep up the shore. All through

the history of the Church we see this, ever going back to the fountain-head, returning to Christ to gain fresh vigour and new insight. It is got not by new discoveries, but by a completer grasp of what it already has, digging deeper to find the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in Christ. The Church falls back, as it were, to review her possessions, to remind herself of them. Every revival of religion is to save the Church from forgetfulness—forgetfulness of the essential things. The progress of religious truth is by way of remembrance with a new light in it, not by discovery of the new, but by recovery of the old, seeing more clearly into what it contains, dispensing with all that is temporary and accidental, and laying hold of what is of the essence of truth.

In the individual life also the method of religion is by way of remembrance. It is a going back to something we possessed before, listening to an old voice, submitting to an old inspiration, accepting an old instinct. It is a reawakening of our real nature. The religious appeal is ever to something innate, to spiritual capacity which we have by right of birth, though that capacity be smothered by the mass of secular concerns that fill so much of our life. It is really, we feel, a coming to ourselves, having our

minds stirred by way of remembrance, as the Prodigal Son at last in the far country came to himself and remembered his father's house. Religion is simple, elementary, going back to the primordial type of life. When we bend to God, it awakens in us echoes of long-remembered and long-forgotten strains; it is like a sweet and solemn and holy memory. When we waken to religion we are struck with our folly that we did not see it before, since it lay to our hand all the time, and we just needed to be recalled to it by way of remembrance. It is nothing foreign to our nature, but is our natural life, as God is our natural home. Religion in its essence is to become again a little child, to go back to what we were—what indeed we really are when all the wrappings of worldliness are stripped off us. We see the Kingdom of God when we come thus with the child's eyes and the child's heart. When we are so converted, it is not like being transported into a strange and foreign land, it is like being restored to our own native land after a long and dark exile. We are home at last from a far country, where we should never have been but for our own folly and sin. We are reinstated in our own rightful place.

It is by way of remembrance that every religious message comes to us, touching a string of early mem-

ory. This is the deep thought in the Platonic fancy of which Wordsworth made such beautiful use in his "Ode on Immortality": that our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting; that the dream-like vividness and splendour of sight in childhood speak of a prior state of existence, and the soul comes from God with vague memories of another life; and that through time shades of the prison-house begin to close upon us, and so the way to true joy is by way of remembrance, by

> Those first affections,
> Those shadowy recollections,
> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
> Are yet a master light of all our seeing.

Religious teaching is thus distinguished from all other teaching. It uses some of the same methods, but it points to a different end. It is not merely information, the acquisition of new facts, however true. It cannot be satisfied until it touches that chord of the spiritual nature which proclaims man akin to God. That is reached when we recover faith and attain the simple, trusting, artless attitude of a child. Other education can go on by set rule, by prescribed task, from text-book to text-book; but this education must also go back and within till it regains the sense of God's presence. The method of preaching, therefore,

is not merely stating truths which men may accept, but is also to stir up pure minds by way of remembrance. Religion is concerned not only about views and systems of truth, important though these be, but chiefly about bringing men to self-consciousness and consciousness of God; bidding them reflect, turn in upon themselves. This distinction between religious teaching and all other teaching is a fundamental one. When all has been done in the most perfect system of religious education, nothing has been achieved unless the heart is touched and the soul has been held in recollection. It is not just true information about God and about human duty and the like, part and parcel though this is of any religious training worth the name; but it needs to be something more than all this. It must touch a personal chord and move the heart till the whole man gets into a right relation to God. Religion works therefore by inspiration rather than by information. The mind must be stirred; the soul must be stirred to holy recollection. The heart must be wakened to its birthright, to the great vocation among the sons of God.

Anything may do this; anything may open the gate of memory. God is not far from any of us. We dwell on the borderland of the unseen, and though the shades of the prison-house have gathered

round us, we may be recalled by any of the surprises of life. Any event—of sorrow or joy, of loss or gain—may suddenly remind us of God, and thus be an agent of religious education. Should we be so dull of heart and so slow to believe, when everything can speak to us of the spiritual world? What opportunities we have! How mind and heart are stirred by way of remembrance! Are we not pulled up every now and then by some hint or some lesson reminding us of the inward and higher life which we acknowledge to be our true life, although the things of sense keep us blind to its claim over us? But the way of remembrance is never quite closed up. At any point we can be surprised by our own soul; at any point we can be surprised by God. Though we take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, though we ascend up into heaven or make our bed in hell, we cannot escape from the witness to the Divine which our own nature declares. It is not easy to get away from God, so long as the mind may be stirred by way of remembrance.

How true it is that the method of religion is by way of remembrance we see at the very first step of all religion. At the threshold stands repentance, and repentance is awakened memory. It may be the

good of the past or the evil of the past that stirs the heart. In any case it is an appeal to memory. How a revived memory can burn into the conscience, and melt the heart, when nothing else can! It may be the recollection of an early paradise, an innocent youth, a happy home, the sweet affections of other days, the angel faces that smile on us still. The ache of desire for some buried past can turn all the present to ashes. That appeal of memory can move a man when all other motives have lost their grip, and bring him back to God as the prodigal turned at the soft thought of his father's house. Or it may be that repentance is induced by a sin that will not be forgotten or a shame that will not be buried. The very despair of memory may do the work, as it probes the life and lays bare the secret things. The way of remembrance is the ethical method of all ages.

> What can assuage the unforgotten pain,
> And teach the unforgetful to forget?

It is part of the burden and the glory of moral existence that we do not forget. It is because we have a life all our own, with a past all our own; it is because we are spiritual entities, with unbroken continuity of personal life, that religion can get at us thus by way of remembrance. No man is safe from

his past, be it of good or evil. So, repentance comes often as a form of recollection. When we consider and remember and come to ourselves, when memory revives, conscience awakes. The buried past reappears as on some awful Resurrection Day.

We are all open to this appeal, all open to have our minds stirred by way of remembrance; and it is not only sad memory, not only recollection that carries with it a sense of shame. We bring to mind the ever-old, ever-new fact of God's eternal love; we see gracious providence, goodness and mercy that have followed us all our days. Our hearts are stirred into gratitude as well as into contrition by the backward look; and surely also our hearts are stirred into renewed aspiration and resolution to let the consoling, inspiring power of our faith move us to larger service and more loyal devotion. By way of remembrance we think of the love with which the Saviour loved us and gave Himself for us, and we are incited to walk worthy of our great vocation as the children of God.

At the Table of Remembrance we are brought close to the heart of our faith. We do this in remembrance of Jesus, opening ourselves up to the old appeal and humbly acknowledging ourselves His disciples. We recall the gracious story and bring to

recollection the love unto death. Once more our hearts burn within us as He speaks to us by the way. Once more He makes Himself known to us by the breaking of bread. Once more we plight our troth to Him, whose we are and whom we serve. It is the Table of Remembrance, indeed; for it stirs up pure minds by way of remembrance.

## VI

## THE SACRAMENTAL COMMITTAL

*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.*— 2 Timothy i. 12.

Personal trust is at the basis of the life of faith. Till a confession takes on a personal note it is only on the outside of life, so to speak. It is not vital, a living root that feeds the whole tree. Creed in the form of opinions or even formal convictions, creed that is put on and worn like a dress, may cover the nakedness of life, but it is only a fashion of clothes, however correct the fashion may be. It will not stand the wear and tear of life's warfare. A faith that is external to begin with may have many advantages; it may lead a man to much good and save him from much evil, but it is only useful under certain conditions. When the conditions change, or when the man is placed under new circumstances, he has no sure standard. For example, a man may have a high standard of honour about certain things imposed on him by the society in which he lives. It may have

been so accepted by him and taken into the fabric of his mind that it is almost a second nature, and on these points he is safe and knows no doubt. But being only an external code, he is completely at sea when he is confronted by a new set of conditions. He has no inward guide, no inward assurance, no settled general principles by which to regulate conduct. That is the difference between a vital creed and a conventional one. A conventional creed may do very well so far as it goes, but it cannot go very far at the best. It has a very limited range, and beyond that is a foreign country. It can have no assurance of tread in the great maze of life.

We note also about a conventional creed that there is no passionate note of conviction. There is no thrill in its assertions, no deep that speaks to deep, no height that answers height. It does not convince, because it is not convinced. This does not mean that it necessarily always speaks with a false tone. It may be quite real, but its reality does not go down to the foundation of life. It is not part of the man's very nature, something of which he is as sure as he is of himself. The faith that is personal and intimate, born of the soul, a fact and a force of the inner life, cannot be dissevered from the being and nature of the man. It grows with his growth, and

lives with his life, and is "the master-light of all his seeing." When it speaks it speaks of knowledge and persuasion; it utters the reality of the soul; it issues from the fountain of life. It adjusts itself to every change of environment and is a principle of choice and decision in every crisis. It is a centre round which the whole life moves, a centre of rest and a centre of impulse. It speaks with the calm conviction of assurance, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

Such a faith means courage. It lives in the dark day, and does not lose grip though the sun is not shining. It does not take fright at the thought of danger; for it is not dependent on outside circumstances. It is willing to suffer, and can endure through the storm. A fair-weather faith languishes at a frown. It withers because it has no root. It cannot stay the soul in the hour of need, and support it amid trial. It breaks down under the weight. A conventional creed without the personal relation has no inner sanctuary, within which it can retire in the evil day. The house of life is not built on the rock, and when the rain descends and the floods come and beat upon it little wonder if it falls. But a

personal faith, that is knit into the being till it is as flesh of the flesh and bone of the bone, can endure and suffer and survive; for it gets new strength for every strain and is fed from a perennial source. It was this that made the Apostle say, "For the which cause I suffer also these things; yet I am not ashamed; for I know." Even though he tastes sorrow and suffering and earthly shame, his real mood is not shame but exultation. There is strength beyond his strength, a deep basal trust to calm the quaking flesh, a refuge ready for the hour of greatest need. With such a present faith the only thing he could be afraid of would be fear, and the only thing he could be ashamed of would be shame. "I suffer, yet I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

What has he committed to God? The Greek word means, *my deposit*—"I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit." The figure is, of course, obvious—a deposit put into the hands of a depository with what appears to be sufficient security, a trust placed with an absolutely trustworthy trustee. What has been committed which he is sure will be carefully and safely kept? Some give elaborate reasons why

it should be interpreted to mean his soul, or faith in immortality, or salvation, or the care of the Churches, or his converts who were a burden of love on his heart, and such like particular precious things for which Paul trusts God. But it does not mean any of these things, though it includes them all. The phrase is vague, and meant to be vague, "my deposit." It means that Paul had committed to Him everything, and was persuaded that He was able to keep it all. The emphasis is not on what the deposit was, but on the fact that the deposit is safe. If you want one word for the deposit, the one word is *himself.* The deposit includes all that Paul had trusted God for. He trusts God for his soul, but no more than he trusts Him for his body. He trusts God for salvation hereafter, but no more than he trusts Him for his life here. He trusts Him for the converts and Churches, as he trusts Him for all personal cares. The word has no definite limits, and was not meant to have limits, "My deposit," that which I have committed unto Him. The force of the sentence is in the fact that the deposit is safe where it is. It is in the right hands, and he need neither be afraid nor ashamed. It is the Guarantor he is thinking of, not the special things that have been guaranteed; the Trustee, not the different items of the trust.

What is the security? The security is God Himself. His character is the guarantee, and Paul's knowledge of Him gives the confidence. In the ultimate issues even in our dealings with one another we fall back on the same principle of personal guarantee. We trust each other little or much, but without trust there could be no relations, no social structure, no business even. We are accustomed to put some measure of trust on character. A rogue will be a rogue and will take people in, no matter how carefully the regulations of business are planned; but if there were nothing but roguery the social contract would be dissolved. Thus from our common experience we get light on the thought which lay back of the Apostle's mind as he used this figure of God. We know something of what it is to trust a personal guarantee, and surely we know some that are to us stronger than any material security or legal bond. There are men to whom you would feel safe to commit anything. In spite of a cynical distrust of human nature so widely preached, there are cases where you feel your greatest security is the man himself, his character, his probity, his good faith. The very heart of the sublime faith expressed in this verse is the personal guarantee. Paul has handed over his deposit, committed his all to God, and the

security is God Himself. This is the source of the confidence and peace and strength. This is why he can suffer if need be. This is why he is not ashamed. He has put his treasure in a bank that cannot fail. He has leant his weight on a support that cannot bend or break. His confidence has a personal source in his experience of God's love. He is not afraid for his deposit. "I know Him whom I have trusted, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

One aspect of the Christian life is a consideration of what is committed to us, our duty regarding it, our responsibility to walk worthy of our great vocation, the sense of trusteeship that should make life sacred and solemn, remembering ever the day when we shall give in an account of our stewardship. But before that is a primary thought of what we have committed to God in simple faith that He is able to keep it against that day. This thought is not only the beginning of religion, but is also the middle and the end. It is first and last and all through. It is the faith that is to inspire the duty. This is the aspect that most naturally should be in our minds to-day as we make the sacramental committal. By sign and symbol we commit ourselves to the great

love of God. We believe it; we accept it; we rest on it; we feed on it. Humbly and confidently we give our deposit of faith, believing, persuaded that He is able to keep what we have committed unto Him.

To make that sacramental committal is to dower our hearts with peace and courage. Though there be trials behind us and troubles before, yet from this vantage-point of light and love we see enough to know that we need neither be afraid nor ashamed. There is peace even in the thought of having committed yourself, as moral strength also comes from the mere fact of decision. The gain will be a permanent and continual one if we do not forget the personal source of the confidence and peace and strength in Christ. "I know Him whom I have believed." Let us commit ourselves freely to His love. Let us make a personal transaction of it. Let us remind ourselves what causes we have for making the committal, and what valid reason we have to be sure of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. These sacramental tokens are more than simple *signs* of great spiritual realities: they do more than represent truth. They are, indeed, signs that stand to us for the deepest truths of the faith; they tell over again to us in dumb speech the wondrous story of the love

of God; but they are more. In the word of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, they are *seals* as well as signs. A seal meant an extra and special confirmation to a contract. It gave a document finality as something that could not be departed from. So this sealing ordinance confirms to us the Father's promise and the Saviour's love. Take the bread and the wine not merely as symbols of the divine love, but also as sealing that love with an irrefragable bond. Can we trust Christ? Can we commit ourselves to Him? Surely we cannot come so near to His heart without feeling sure of Him. We cannot look upon the signs and seals without being convinced of His deathless love. We know whom we have believed; and we make the sacramental committal.

What have we committed unto Him against that day? Ah, if there is anything lacking to our peace, it is because there has been something lacking in our committal. If we have any unrest of soul, it is because we have kept back something. If our joy to-day is not full, it is because we have not committed everything unto Him against that day. Is there anything in your life, any burden whose weight would not be lightened, any sorrow whose pain would not be lessened, any care or anxiety whose sting would not be drawn by a frank and full committal of it

to God? "Cast thy burden on the Lord and He shall sustain thee." Is there any path of life so dark and hard that light could not come to the feet from submitting all to God in humble, simple faith? "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." Is there any stain of the past, any doubt of the present, any fear of the future that could not be relieved by a free bestowal of all you are? Is there any part of your being—body, soul, and spirit—that He has no claims over, and that will not be enriched and glorified by being offered to its Lord? If we would taste the full comfort of Communion and enter into its peace and joy, we must trust the eternal love, and know whom we have believed. We must bring our life's poor hoard, and give it into His faithful keeping. Let us do this in remembrance of Him. And in the sweet assurance of His love, in the glad faith of the Table, we will be persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day.

## VII

## A FURTHER SACRAMENTAL COMMITTAL

*That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.*—2 Timothy i. 14.

The Apostle has uttered his magnificent personal faith that he knows whom he has believed. The basis of his confidence is that he has made full surrender to the will and love of God. He has given himself: body, soul, and spirit; his life, past, present, and future; as a trust, the security for which is the character of the Trustee. He has handed over all he has and it is as a deposit, which he is confident God will guard. "I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." He is in His gracious and faithful keeping, and all must be well.

This, too, is our sacramental committal. By sign and symbol God offers His great love to us in Christ Jesus; and we commit ourselves to it. Our confidence is not in ourselves, but in Him, in His power and desire to save and keep and hold and guard.

None can pluck us out of His hand of love. Our deposit is safe. We enter into peace when we enter into this relation with our Heavenly Father. We take the bread and wine as seals attesting His promises and confirming His love. Not upon us but upon Him is the burden: not in us but in Him is the strength: not unto us but unto Him be the glory. A frank and full and free committal is what our sacrament implies on our part. We need not fear for the result; we need not hesitate as to the security; we need have no doubts as to the strength of our support. He cannot fail nor disappoint us. He will justify our faith in our own experience. We know whom we have believed and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day.

The Apostle turns from this personal faith which is the common Christian confession, and says, "That good thing which was committed unto Thee, keep." It seems like a flat contradiction of what has gone before. The same words and the very same figure are used in what seems an opposite sense. He had said, "He is able to guard my deposit"; and here he says, "The good deposit guard thou." But they are only two aspects of the same Christian life. The one is what we in our faith have committed to God.

The other is what God has committed to us. We have spoken of the sacramental committal in which we throw ourselves on the eternal love, but the inevitable consequence of that is another committal in which we almost seem thrown back on ourselves. We have entrusted God with our deposit, made Him our trustee in whom we confide. Then we realise that God confides in us, makes us trustees of a great trust, give us a deposit which we are to guard, commits to us something for our faithful keeping. Our sacramental committal involves this further committal, and the grace of Communion has not had free course in our hearts unless it issues in this. It is privilege pointing to duty, grace demanding its price, a gift claiming responsibility.

We can be sure that what we have committed to God is safe. Can God be sure of us? It is because our keeping of our trust is so precarious, because we are so fickle and thoughtless, because we can sometimes even forget that we are called to a great vocation and must one day give in an account of our stewardship, that we should use this occasion to remind ourselves of the charge given us to keep. We come to the mount of Communion and our hearts are warm and tender as we remember our Lord's great love. We are open to new impulses and fuller

revelations. We must use this time as an opportunity to enrich and strengthen our whole life. The task of life is to keep the good we have received, to let no man filch from us our crown. The daily problem to all of us is to preserve our best impulses, to keep our ground gained at such times of insight and faith. We are inclined to think at times like this that we have now achieved the summit, that we will never again live in the low levels of thought and life, that our besetting sins are now put away for ever and will no more drag us down. We have a rush of confident power when we make the sacramental committal and lay our full weight on God's love. Faith is easy and love is natural and service looks sweet for the sake of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Temptation seems to lift clear away from our life in the sunshine of this hour.

But the trial will come as it has come before. It may not be in some great temptation, but merely in the stress and strain of daily life, in the constant impact of our environment. We have received the good deposit of the faith; and the one task of life is to keep it. We know from sad experience that we will need to use all our arts and wiles and spiritual tactics to guard the citadel that now seems so secure. Let us not blind ourselves to the facts, and fall through silly

conceit. God is able to keep what we have committed to Him. We have no fear or doubt of that. But are we able to keep what He has committed to us? Our faith in God *is* justified; His promises are sure; His word stands fast; His love will be the same for ever that it is to-day. But has our faith any justification in ourselves? Remember the test of faith is faithfulness. Have we in us the stuff that will not weary or falter, that will make us stand a sleepless sentinel at the post till relief comes? Does the word thrill us with resolution: "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life"? Ah, we know the truth of Wordsworth's lines in this deepest region of life:

> 'Tis the most difficult of tasks to *keep*
> Heights which the soul is competent to gain.

It cannot be done by spasms, by special effulgent moments on the mount, by fitful desultory acts of Communion. It needs a power that is continuous, consecutive, with its seat on the throne of our heart. Our faith must not depend for sustenance on such special occasions as this, useful and necessary though they be. We must live along an unbroken line. If here at the Table we gain any new impulse, any new inspiration, any closer contact with the spiritual, we

must give ourselves to keep what we have gained. "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep through the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us." That is the secret and the source of strength. The Spirit which dwelleth in us. Communion must be more than an act. It must be the attitude of our whole life. If we abide in Christ there will be no gap in the line, no time when we are off our guard. Communion will go on right through the days. So long as we keep hold of God's love, so long as we keep hold of Christ, so long as the Holy Spirit dwells in us, it will be easy to confess the good confession, to fight the good fight, to finish the course, to keep the faith. The two sides of the Christian life are both true, that we must guard our deposit as if everything depended on our own efforts, and we must commit all to God as if everything depended on Him alone, as it does.

> Watch as if on that alone
> Hung the issues of the day;
> Pray that help may be sent down,
> Watch and pray.

Remember also that there has been committed unto us a *cause*, as well as a gift. In a very real sense the interests of the Kingdom of God lie in our hands. We are trustees of a great treasure not

merely for our own need but for the world's sake. The honour and reputation of our Master have been committed to us. Christians are representatives of Christ, and to a large extent the world will judge Him by them. It is a call to us to walk in wisdom and in love, to walk worthy of our great vocation. We who have been keeping the feast may we keep what the feast means, may we keep the faith, and serve as faithful stewards of the grace of God. In peace and joy we gladly believe that He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him. May that sense of privilege not leave us till it impresses us with its corresponding duty: "That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep."

## VIII

## THE PURSUING SOUL: AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM LXIII. BEFORE COMMUNION

*My soul followeth hard after Thee: Thy right hand upholdeth me.*—PSALM lxiii. 8.

THE poet Donne says in a sermon: "There are some certain Psalms that are imperial Psalms, that command over all affections and spread themselves over all occasions—catholic universal Psalms, that apply themselves to all necessities. This is one of those." It is truly an imperial Psalm. It reveals and explains the empire over the hearts and souls of men which the Psalms have held. In this Psalm we are brought into contact with the highest reach of Old Testament religion and the deepest spirit of the Psalter itself. Nowhere is there such sweet tenderness and deep feeling; nowhere such intense devotion and passionate love; nowhere such fine expression of exalted spiritual fervour. The heart of all spiritual religion is communion, and the aim of

all high faith is communion; and nowhere does communion find such classic expression.

But, alas! just because it is such an imperial Psalm we often feel it is not for us, that we cannot take its words into our mouth, and cannot spread it over all our occasions and apply it to all our necessities. When the author rises to the ecstatic state where his soul seems joined to God, few of us can follow him. We move with broken wing when he soars up into the light. We rarely, if ever, reach such heights. We almost feel that it would be unreal for us to use his words as if they could accurately state our actual feelings. Yet, as we look forward to Communion, it is good for us to see what Communion may be to a man, good for us to hold out the ideal before our eyes of a soul following hard after God and cleaving fast to Him, upheld by His right hand. In the early Church this was the morning song prescribed to be sung, because it is so full of love and desire, and so full of joy and praise. As we think of the symbols of Communion suggesting to us a relation even more intimate and a love more sweet than ever Psalmist could imagine, let us cast away our fears and use these blessed words of the Psalmist to revive desire in us and to remind us of what is possible for us. For, the same needs that

moved this man are ours, and the same satisfaction that met his needs is open to us also.

The subject of the Psalm is the heart's longing for God and the heart's joy in His fellowship—the need for communion and the joy of communion. The human need for God to which this Psalmist gave voice demands a similar expression from us. Men may say that man cannot know God, can have no personal relations with the great First Cause. They may say that there is no evidence that God, if He exists, interests Himself in man. They may say that finite man has really no capacities by which he could appreciate the infinite. They may say all that—and more—may say even flatly that there is no God. But they cannot say that man has no need of God, that man has no desires towards God, no instincts and cravings and spiritual wants. All history throbs with the passion of human longing. "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." Humanity holds out groping hands to the unseen, erects altars to the Unknown God. Without God life is a dry and weary land where no water is. Heart and flesh cry out for the living God. The need is ours if only to make life coherent and save it from being a tragic farce. Augustine's *Confessions* before his conversion gives the record of a man of keen intellect with all possi-

bility of the highest satisfaction of mind, yet is frank in the acknowledgment of utter failure to find rest. He was full of longing, full of the torment of unsatisfied desire. He knew even then what he expressed afterwards in immortal phrase: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our heart is restless until it find rest in Thee." For years before he would make submission he could use the very words of this Psalm about himself; his soul thirsted for God, his flesh longed for Him in a dry and weary land where no water is.

But exceeding all that dim and dumb desire, that sense of incompleteness which men feel, is the desire of the man who has known God that he might enter into full communion and that interrupted fellowship might be renewed. The Psalmist's situation corresponds somewhat; for he is absent from the sanctuary where alone he could realise to the full his loving worship. Absence to him only made the heart grow fonder. The sense of deprivation brought his sense of need keenly to his knowledge. To his thirsty soul and longing flesh he is as in a dry and weary land where no water is. He comforts himself by happy memory when in times past he had seen God's power and glory revealed in the sanctuary. He would fain be there still, as another Psalmist in

similar plight sighed: "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord." But this soul refuses to be chained to the material. He has learned that, though distant from the Temple, he is not separated from God. His heart is a sanctuary. Spiritually he dwells in the House of the Lord, and feels that the divine love follows him. He had valued highly the opportunities afforded by the Temple and the institutions of worship, all the aids to devotion of the sanctuary. He had valued them more highly than we do the Church and sacraments, for they meant more to the religion of his time. But now that he had lost the symbol, he had not lost the substance for which it stood. Religion meant more to him than outward ceremonial, however helpful. Calvin draws this lesson for us: "The mystical union subsisting between Christ and His members should be matter of reflection not only when we sit at the Lord's Table, but at all other times. Or suppose that the Lord's Supper and other means of advancing our spiritual welfare were taken from us by an exercise of tyrannical power, it does not follow that our minds should ever cease to be occupied with the contemplation of God." This Psalmist had got past the sign to the reality, and his cry was not for the

sanctuary, but for the God of the sanctuary. Every pulse of his being thrills with love of God.

The Hebrew division of human nature was a two-fold division, into soul and flesh or body. When the Psalmist speaks of his soul thirsting and his flesh longing, he means that his whole being desires God; his entire nature, body and spirit, aches for God, as that other Psalmist, whom we have already quoted, who had also penetrated past the symbols of religion, said: "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." So convinced was the sacred poet here of this that he feels that there is to him nothing else in all the universe but God and his own soul. For example, life to him is a great blessing. It is the physical basis of all other possible blessings. But he declares: "Thy lovingkindness is better than life." That to him is the true life, the only life to be called life. Knowing that, possessing that, he is content, he has all things, he abounds. His soul, as he goes on to sing, shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness, and his mouth shall sing praises with joyful lips. There has been established between this soul and God a personal relation of communion, which he himself describes in these words: "My soul followeth hard after Thee: Thy right hand upholdeth me." Man's desire is met by God's love. He clings to God and

God upholds him: He follows hard after God, and God never lets him go. So he says, and feels.

This verse describing the mutual relation between his soul and God is an epitome of the whole Psalm, and is a summary of his faith and life. God has been his help and in the shadow of His wings he exults, shouts for joy. His soul is satisfied as with marrow and fat, and he sings with jubilant lips. He is never without resource. Is he in a dry and weary land where no water is?—his soul is satisfied with good things, and out of the glare he creeps into the shadow of the eternal wings. Is it in the night time, in sleepless watches?—he welcomes the quiet opportunity to remember God and meditate on His love. However dark and dreary, he is never lonely—he puts out his hand and feels that He is near, he rests in the presence of his gracious Companion.

Did the joy of communion ever find such beautiful expression? Did man ever state it in more winning and attractive form? Instead of saying a lot of things in general about communion,—the how and the why and the when and the wherefore,—is it not something better than answering all these questions simply to look on this fair life and sweet soul? Take this Psalm for reflection and meditation, and see if in any sense you can use the gracious words for

yourself. It is much to know that such a relation has been, that a man has been so near the secret. We feel that this man's words are true. He was a sincere and transparent soul simply and sweetly and humbly apprehending God, living and walking in the light. We feel that he speaks out of experimental faith. He knows whom he has believed. He has proved and tested his faith, and found it fit to live by. Nay, God's lovingkindness is better than life. Without it there would be nothing to live for.

We have pledges of that love more precious than this pious heart could even dream of. The symbols of Communion speak to us with a power and a pathos that would have put new music into the Psalmist's song and a new wonder into his heart. Is the food for the hungry soul less rich and less bountiful in Communion than when this man sang with joyful lips: "My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness"? Have we less worthy things to meditate on in the night watches? Were the power and glory symbolised in the Jewish Temple more affecting and inspiring than the broken bread and the wine poured out? Where, then, are the jubilant lips? The Psalmist shames us by his joy and peace and by his devotion and love and spiritual desire. Let us use his example to revive our faith and inflame our

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hearts with fresh devotion, to renew in us an appreciation of God's goodness and lovingkindness. May it make us eager to taste and see that the Lord is good. May it quicken in us the soul-appetite for communion. If we hunger and thirst and long for God, will not we too be satisfied with His mercy? If we can say, "My soul followeth hard after Thee," we also can be sure of this both now and for ever, "Thy right hand upholdeth me." If God is our desire, God will be our portion. The pursuing soul reaches at last his goal and is satisfied. God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

## IX

## THE LORD'S DESIRE

*With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*—Luke xxii. 15.

"*The feast of unleavened bread drew nigh,* which is called the Passover," a great time in every Jewish house, and to Jesus and His disciples this particular Passover was to be full of special significance. The usual preparations were made, but every incident mentioned in the narrative heightens the sense of solemnity. There were deeper preparations, no doubt, than those made by Peter and John when they went to the good-man of the house with a message: "The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest chamber where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples?" We are made to feel the elements of tragedy as the story unfolds how, when the time of the feast drew nigh, malice and hatred reached a climax without, and treachery within. "*Then came the day* of unleavened bread when the Passover must be killed," and we have the Master's thoughtful consideration, and the disciples' affectionate preparations. "And

*when the hour was come,* He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him." Every touch adds significance to the narrative, increasing the sense of importance which indeed the Church afterwards has felt to lie in this simple feast.

It is not only the simple, loving desire of Jesus to be as much in the company of His disciples as possible before the end came. This is the culmination of the whole work of the Redeemer, and the story is told that we may realise it to be so. The deeper explanation is found in this region. The time of the Master's baptism of fire is come, and as He had said before on looking forward to it: "How am I straitened until it be accomplished." It was the constraint of love to finish the work He had been given to do. The strange combination we find in the word "passion," as meaning both a great flame of love and a fierce flame of suffering, has never been so illustrated anywhere as in the Passion of our Lord. It was desire and anguish, sweet and bitter, love and suffering. When the hour was come and He sat down at the prepared feast, He said: "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

The Passion has begun. There is fathomless depth of love in it, and the fathomless mystery of sorrow.

The feast was the prelude to the suffering, and yet He desired it. Nay, we can say that the feast was the prelude to the suffering, and *therefore* He desired it. For, that way of the Cross whose shadow lay athwart His steps was the way of the Father's will and the way of redemption. We are made to feel that this was a new passover of which the old was merely a dim and shadowy emblem. In this new passover the victim is himself the priest, and the redemption achieved is something profounder than the release from Egypt. It was for this that Christ had come and had been preparing, and to this He had been looking forward with eagerness and with fear, straitened till it be accomplished. The disciples do not understand the full solemnity of the hour and the act. They had been concerned about arrangements and some even were squabbling about precedence, but they are made to feel at last something of the awe in the Master's heart.

Why did He desire with such eager, ardent longing to eat this special Passover with them? (I.) *For His own sake.* "Before I suffer." There was comfort to His own heart that He should be able to manifest His love. With tender, solemn thought He had looked forward to it, and He desired the support of their fellowship for what lay before Him. We

think of our Holy Communion as representing the satisfaction of our desire, and it is so. It typifies to us all the strength and comfort of our faith, all the gifts bestowed on us, the gifts of the Father's love, the gift of God which is eternal life. We think of what it means to us that fellowship with God is possible, that we can walk in His light and have our souls fed with His love. We think of all we can get, and do get, from religion, support in temptation, strength in weakness, comfort of sorrow, forgiveness of sin, and abundant entrance into the household of faith and love. It is mostly the satisfaction of our desire we think of, and this is natural, but it is also and first of all, the satisfaction of His desire—the love that is never weary of giving, but can find no rest until it finds opportunities of giving; the love that ever longs to pour out its treasures on the loved. If we have ever sought God, it is because He has first sought us. If we have found Him, it is because He has found us. If we love Him, it is because He first loved us. If with any sort of desire we have desired communion, it is because with a deeper desire He has desired it. God is far more willing and eager to give than we are to receive. The Master here desired to eat this Passover with His disciples before He suffered, for His own sake, for

the satisfaction of His own love, for the support to His own soul as He went to the last act of His Passion. It is the nature of such love as His to desire this. It can have no satisfaction until it gives itself. So that until we respond to the love of God we are not only depriving ourselves of the best blessing, but we are also robbing God. We are refusing a love that desires with great desire. Can even the Lord's Passion be said to be accomplished so long as He has this cross on His heart, so long as we refuse to let Him give Himself?

(II.) *For their sake also.* The final act of suffering would be a great trial to the disciples. They were to know something of the sorrow of desolation, and Christ was eager to prepare them for that dark future. He was eager to seal the truth on their hearts, and make them know that His very death which they would mourn was a manifestation of His love. He wished to comfort them with His presence, and to lead them gently into the deep things. If they were assured of His deathless love they would find comfort when the shock of His death came. They could look back on this feast and on these words, and gather strength to suffer and to wait. And so it is for us also who are His disciples. Our feast of love not only represents the desire of the

Lord to give Himself, but represents the joy of the gift to us. "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover *with you.*" This manifestation of love is for our comfort and strength, and we, like the disciples, can use the occasion to prepare us for what lies before us. There may be trial, burdens heavy to be borne; there may be suffering for us as for Him; there must be death one day. And before such happenings it is surely a comfort and strength for us also to become sure of the love of God in Christ. If we can in any sense apply these words to ourselves which the Master used to His first disciples, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you," it must be an inspiration in every dark pass of life. The thought of God's interest in us and love for us is indeed an inspiration.

(1) *In sorrow* there is no other way of permanent comfort. We may learn to bear and harden ourselves for the blow, but there is no issue into peace that way. There is sorrow too deep for surface healing, and the heart that alone knows the heart's bitterness needs inward remedy. Only the assurance of God's love can do for us what we need in the desolate hour, and we take our Communion as speaking to us of the desire of God's love on our behalf. The love that takes us by green pastures and quiet waters is

with us also in the dark valley of the shadow. To be sure of God's love is to be content even in the night of sorrow; for the day will break and the shadows flee away.

(2) Or *in temptation* there is inspiration in this same thought. Nothing will enable us to stand up under the fierce moral trial of life, except this assurance of God's interest in us and His highest desire for us. We cannot escape temptation—it meets us in the face, it creeps up behind us, it plucks us on this side and on that. The life of moral man is the tempted life. So insistent and persistent is temptation that alone we have no chance of victorious resistance. But when we are not alone, when we know ourselves re-enforced by all-conquering love, the impossible becomes possible. Prepare yourselves for every temptation that can meet you by strengthening yourselves at the Holy Table. To be sure of our Father's interest and love is bread and wine that can feed the hungry soul and support it in the fiery trial of temptation.

(3) Or take the doleful mother, of both sorrow and temptation, *sin,* what possibility of escape is there except here in what Communion stands for, the compassionate, forgiving love of God? That He should desire to give us His love, to give us Him-

self, is our only hope. We are like lost sheep that have wandered out of the way, and lost we must remain if the Good Shepherd go not to seek and to save the lost. If there be no passion of desire in His heart to save, we cannot save ourselves. Our Communion speaks to us of His desire. It is because He desired it with such intensity that He suffered and that He made this Passover a pledge of His desire before He suffered. He was called Jesus because He saves His people from their sins. He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The simple symbols of our feast mean for us forgiveness, cleansing, renewed strength—all to deal with this tragedy of sin that mars our life.

If the Saviour with desire desires to eat this Passover with us, shall there be no corresponding desire in our heart? Will there be no answering response? It is all He asks for—desire. If we come humbly because we need, because we want, because we desire, He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him. It is not only that He gives gracious gifts for our need in sorrow or temptation or sin, and not only that He gives love, but also that He gives Himself. When we can say, "There is none on earth that I desire besides Thee," we are on the way to be satisfied.

# X

## CORDS OF A MAN: AFTER COMMUNION

*I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat before them.*—Hosea xi. 4.

Hosea, who lived at the decline and fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, had to speak mostly of doom. He was face to face with the evil conditions which he knew must result in doom. His sensitive heart was torn with anguish as he saw the sin and misery of his time, and as he looked forward to the dark days in front of them. The nation was blundering on to ruin through the stupidity of rulers, the formalism of religion, and the consequent degradation of life. With a miserable opportunism, which has always been thought by worldly-wisdom to be true statecraft, the ruling classes were intriguing now with Egypt and now with Assyria, not understanding that they were only making their country a pawn in the great game of these two world-powers. Through the weakening of religion, corruption was eating into the morale of the people.

The prophet, loving his country with a passionate devotion, had no hope for the future except from the mercy of God using the inevitable chastisement to bring Israel back to a purer faith and a nobler life. This is why, in spite of his intense patriotism, he almost welcomes the exile he predicts. Just because of this mercy and love of God in which he trusts, he never ceases to hope against hope, to strive up to the very last to lead the people to a better mind. The book is full of the most tender appeals, that after all these centuries touch the heart still with their pathos. He breaks off from denunciation and judgment ever and anon into pleadings and persuasions. It is a book of tears and blood. It reads like the tossing of a soul in the agony of hopeless love; and yet because he never ceases to love, he never quite ceases to hope. It reads like a journey in the valley of the shadow of death, through which here and there strike gleams of light, which presage an ultimate exit from the gloom into the sunshine once more.

These hopeful moments are chiefly when Hosea reviews the past history of Israel, and tells again how God had chosen them, and led them, and loved them. He cannot believe that God's wonderful love can be lost. It will surely make its irresistible appeal to them still. He dwells on that beautiful past, half

in melancholy reflection on the contrast, and half in persuasive pleading that the old relations between the nation and their God may be restored. The early days in Egypt and the Desert, full of unquestioning faith and devoted service as they seem now, viewed through the softening medium of the years—that history of heroism on the side of Israel was a history of grace on the part of God. The prophet stops in his message of doom to recall lovingly the early period of Israel's national existence, and sees God's love claiming them, and meeting with fit response. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." But even then as the prophet looks back he sees evidences of the same unthinking, rebellious disposition, the same ingratitude, the same lack of appreciation that God was leading and training them. "I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by the arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat before them."

The two figures express the thought of special providence which had watched over their past, a providence which had been continuous, beginning with them in their youth and going with them right

up to years of manhood. It was *training,* considerate, kind, designed for their best interests, the training of love. In the earliest days of all God taught the nation to walk, holding it by the arms, with patience and affection, as a mother teaches her child, encouraging him, but not too quickly lest he should overtask his strength; and when he falls taking him up in her arms, comforting him and healing him.

And then as the nation grew strong and could walk, and like a child now grown to manhood was set tasks and had to bend to serious burdens, like the oxen which did all the draught-work in Palestine, the figure changes from that of a loving father or mother teaching a child to that of a considerate master driving a team of oxen. A kind waggoner is thoughtful about his beasts, seems to enter sympathetically into any special difficulty of the road, goes to their head and with a word and a touch makes them feel that he is not neglectful. The yoke, in the case of draught-oxen, is fixed over the brow near the horns, and so comes down over the jaws. The merciful driver eases the yoke where it bites the cheeks, and by his encouraging touch gets them over hard places; and when the time of rest comes, slips the yoke off their jaws that they may eat their meat easily.

When Israel was grown up and had to carry heavy burdens, which is the lot of all men, God was to them as a considerate Master, never leaving them, making them feel that He was with them through it all, setting them to the tasks, and gently leading them, and strenuously upholding them, taking His place beside them, treating them with human sympathy, drawing them with cords of a man, with bands of love.

They are homely figures of a father with the patience of love towards his little child, and of a waggoner with the kindness of sympathy towards his labouring cattle; but what figures could be more expressive of the thought which Hosea is seeking to express of the constant loving providence of God? To the understanding heart, God's love was seen to be brooding over Israel's past: it and it alone was the explanation of their history: and it is the explanation even of the severe discipline which the prophet predicted for the disobedient children, the unruly heifers which Israel had become. His love faileth never. Out of the darkness, which was settling down over the apostate people, comes a voice, a passionate, pleading voice, a voice which breaks with tenderness, a voice from the very heart of the Eternal, the voice of exhaustless love that cannot be worn out. Out

of the deep of judgment comes that voice, pleading, beseeching still: "How can I give thee up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender thee, O Israel? How can I give thee up? My heart is turned within Me. I am melted with sympathy." He would still as of old, still even at the eleventh hour, draw them with cords of a man, with bands of love.

Is not this explanation of Israel's history the true reading of our own experience? The secret of all God's dealings with us is love. Surely we see this now as we look back, and recall each separate stage. If we have any spiritual insight we must see that God has been in all our life, loving us from earliest days, teaching us first by instinctive faith, with the care and patience of a father; accepting from us childish almost unconscious trust, though we may not have known that He healed us. "I girded thee, though thou didst not know Me." And then when the burden of life came upon us, when we had to bend our neck to the yoke like labouring cattle, He made us strong by the assurance of His sympathy. Even in the experience that was hardest to understand, one day it comes to us with the force of a revelation that God has been teaching and training us. It is this that makes the religious man, and distinguishes him from the irreligious. Upon all

men are laid the trials and tasks of life; to all men come the burden and the yoke. To most it comes in the form of work, the daily routine and drudgery. In what are we different from the draught-oxen that plod with their load? In what so good, if they know their master and respond to his word and move to his touch? It is here is seen the inspiring power of religion, the sense of carrying the burdens for God, that, like the waggoner to his team, He has set us to the work, and given us the task. There is no other way of ennobling work from drudgery, and consecrating life into service.

The religious man knows that God is in all his experience, ever drawing him with cords of a man, with bands of love. This consciousness of the divine sympathy makes a man strong, and assures him that his life is worth living since it commands the interest of heaven. But for this, what a poor futile thing human life would be, lived under a grey sky on a sodden earth! And what soulless drudgery all work would be, a monotone of labour, instead of a harmony of duty! In the inspiring power of God's love we are not dumb, driven cattle who can understand nothing but the lash; we are instead co-workers with God, and He becomes as a man beside us, with gentle sympathy and helpful kindness.

If this relationship between a man and God were possible, could there be anything to match it as a motive for lifting life to high levels of thought and endeavour? If it were possible for a man to so walk with God his Master, and for God to so condescend to man His creature, would it not transform the world to the man, making duty light, and rough places smooth, and flooding all life with grace and beauty? If it were possible! That it is possible is a fact of religious experience. The whole Bible is the revelation of God as precisely that, declaring His desire for man to be that, asserting the possibility of that. Hosea saw the past history of Israel to be the very romance of divine love. It was the key to explain all His dealing with them, from their childhood right on through the long years of training. The revelation of God's divinity has been a revelation of His humanity, drawing them with the cords of a man, with bands of love.

How much more clearly should the Christian Church see this than even Hosea, after the greatest of all object-lessons in Jesus Christ! The story of His wonderful life, full of compassion and human sympathy, the grace and truth of His lips, the pity and tenderness of His deeds, His life for love, and death for love, through it all does He not draw us

with cords of a man? If in Christ we have a revelation of the Father, if Jesus stands to us for God, how in the face of all that He was and did can we doubt the eternal love of God? The whole story thrills with human tenderness, with human sympathy, sympathy with men in their joy and their sorrow, sympathy with the little child, and with all on whom the yoke pressed, the labouring and heavy-laden. To all according to their needs He brought a message of good-cheer, comfort to the sorrowing, strength to the weak, forgiveness to the sinful, assuring men of God's sympathy with them in the stress and strain of life's burdens, convincing them that the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind. And in the last great scene of all, which culminated in the Cross, which we commemorated to-day at the Table of His love, it is as the voice of exhaustless love which Hosea utters: "How can I give thee up, my son Ephraim, whom I taught to walk, holding by the arms? How can I surrender thee, Israel?" Witness from the Cross to what extent My love will go, to what sacrifice! If the blood of 'Abel cries from the ground, shall not the blood of Christ cry from the Cross for response to deathless love, and can it cry in vain? Can He fail to draw all men unto Himself? With the cords of a man He is

drawing men: in the bands of love He is binding the world together.

The cords of a man, how feeble they are, and easily evaded; the bands of love, how gently they imprison; a stroke can snap them. Yet the world knows no fetters that can grapple so tight. The cords are steel; the bands are adamant. God comes to us in Christ with a more heart-searching appeal than even the words of Hosea could describe. He comes to us in terms of what we ourselves are. We have no excuse for not knowing God, if He can be known through Jesus; and that He can be known through Jesus is a fact of Christian experience. He does not stand afar off, but stands close beside us, laying a human hand upon us, calling us by a human voice, very man of very man, touching us in the place of our affections, breaking us by His divine sacrifice, melting us by His human compassion, claiming us for His love's sake, drawing us by the cords of a man, holding us by the bands of love. Who can resist the appeal of His broken body and shed blood? Who will not respond to such entreaty?

> **Love I gave thee, with Myself to love,**
> **And thou must love Me who have died for thee.**

## XI

## HEART-DIRECTION

*The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.*—
2 Thessalonians iii. 5.

One of the greatest difficulties in every region of knowledge is to keep the due proportion between the different parts. An exaggeration of one side throws the whole perspective of a subject wrong. Nowhere is this so dangerous as in religion. One-sidedness not only dwarfs the full growth of faith, but also often leads to terrible excesses of life as well as of doctrine. Lack of proportion is deadly in art: it is far more deadly in religion. We know in ordinary intercourse how a half-truth may be the worst of all lies. In religion, it may poison the whole life of a man or a church.

In Thessalonica some of the converts laid hold of one side of St. Paul's teaching, and exaggerated it into the central place in the Christian faith. They took his teaching about being ready for our Lord's coming to mean that they should give up their ordi-

nary occupations and busy themselves with speculations as to when and how He was to come. They neglected or perverted the spiritual application of St. Paul's teaching about the Second Coming. They were living in an unhealthy state of restlessness and excitement. We have a hint of this even in the first Epistle, where the Apostle writes: "Warn them that are unruly." The word is a military one, as so many of St. Paul's terms are. It referred to a soldier who showed insubordination, who would not keep discipline. By this word he warns them against stepping out of the Church's ranks, neglecting the common Christian duties, running after excitement. When this second letter was written, the errors seemed to have increased. Fanaticism, ever the foe of faith, menaced them. Sensational teachers arose, creating a great commotion, telling them of the near approach of Christ and the end of the world. The unsettling of their minds produced disorders of life. Some gave up their ordinary employment, really making it, as St. Paul points out, a plea for idleness. He brands them as "busybodies." This sort of life made them vain and meddlesome, and was an end of all true service. They thought they were very religious by indulging their heated visions of the Coming of Christ. St. Paul shows them that

on the contrary religion consists in the quiet and humble following of duty. "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands." The only cure for fanaticism is faith, which falls back on God, and grows calm there, sweetly resting on His love. St. Paul's counsel to the Thessalonians is that they should go on patiently with the tasks of life, serving their Master humbly, leaving the future in His hands, with hearts directed into the love of God, and the patience of Christ. This is St. Paul's prayer on their behalf, a prayer that they may get back to the centre from which all Christian faith and life proceed, God's love. The remedy for the disorders of life and for the unsettled speculations about the future which afflicted the Church at Thessalonica, is to have their hearts directed into love and patience.

The deepest human need is heart-guidance, the direction of the desires and affections. There is our true life. The body may be held in control; the mind be cultivated into all graceful compliances; but if the heart be unsanctified, undirected, or misdirected, all education and all discipline have only been like dealing with the outside of the cup and platter. The heart is the seat of all good and evil. "Out of it are the issues of life." Till the heart is touched in

a man, nothing is done: we are only scratching the surface. What a man loves is the test of him; not what he says, or thinks, or does. That is why there is no religion, to be called religion, except heart-religion. That is why the Bible seeks by every avenue of approach to come to close quarters with the heart. That is why prophets, and psalmists, and saints, and apostles, and our Lord Himself make this their one theme. Religion would make easy conquests, if it had not to capture this mysterious and elusive citadel. All else can be brought into subjection, while the heart is still a rebel. All work has to be done over again, so long as the heart is untamed. Leviathan may be drawn out with a hook, his tongue pressed down with a cord, a rope put into his nose, his jaw pierced through with a spike; all the diverse activities of man can be restrained and regulated; even the tongue, that unruly evil, can be subdued to some semblance of decency; but who can tame and bridle the high heart of man? What can guard and direct the issues of life?

Yet, till it is held and guided, nothing is achieved. For, sooner or later all the territory gained and held at so great a cost will be regained. The life must follow the fortunes of the heart. Where the heart turns, the feet will wend. What the heart

loves, the fingers will grasp. Who is the master of this proud tyrant? That it needs a master to direct and control, is the lesson of history and life. It cannot be left to its own wayward and despotic will. Hear our Lord's impeachment of the unregulated heart: "From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within and defile the man." And apart from these fruits of unbridled passion, apart from the plain case made out from them for the restraint of the heart; even if no such loathly things ever emerged; the heart would still need guidance to keep it from wasting its unrivalled powers on vanity. Life is difficult for all; the path is beset with dangers, perplexities, and trials, and temptations; the heart directs the tottering, stumbling feet through it all; but who is to direct the heart?

If what the heart loves settles the destiny, every man who desires self-knowledge can have it by asking the question as to what the object of the love is. Love of some sort, or what corresponds to the word, there is, and must be. The human heart hungers for love; the human heart was made to love. The capacity for loving is the deepest note in life. It is the

essential distinction of man, that which makes him man. But to what is it directed? That is the question of questions. How men miss the way! What misdirected affection! What futile, pathetic attempts for the satisfaction of the heart! By what mean motives it often moves, to what small ends it is directed! Hungry hearts lavish their wealth on that which profiteth naught. Thirsty lips in the fever of desire seek the elixir of life from broken cisterns that can hold no water. The object of the heart's affection must be adequate, if it is to satisfy.

Only that heart is safe which loves God. Nothing else can direct and steady and regulate the heart of man, curb its waywardness, hold its passions in check, and satisfy its deepest affections. Only that can save a man from the pitfalls of the way, and bring him through fire and water to a rich place. Only that can direct him past all dangers and temptations, through the heat and burden of the day and the darkening shades of eventime, and lead him out to peace under the silent stars. We know the power of a great affection to preserve and restrain and guide. We know how even a pure earthly love will save a man from gross evils. How much more this love, which fills the whole being, and lifts the life to the highest! The man whose heart is fixed on

God has a moral preservative. He cannot be permanently seduced by the lower loves of earth. He has seen the vision, and has no eyes for baser attractions. If there is a limit above which it seems as if he cannot rise, a limit set to his passion for God by the limitations of human nature, if he feels that weak flesh cannot stand before the full apocalypse of soul—there is also a limit below which he cannot fall. He is held by his love to God, and saved from complete moral collapse. It stands to reason that if a man truly loves God, if his heart is ever being directed into that high love, there is safety for him all along the line. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also; where the heart is, thither will the life move.

St. Paul's prayer, that the hearts of the Thessalonians may be directed into the love of God, means love for God. He assures them that if they love God with all their heart, the way will be made plain to them; they will school themselves into duty, they will hush themselves into peace. But we cannot love at will. We cannot be argued into loving—we cannot argue ourselves into loving. We cannot love because it would be a good thing for us, nor even because we are persuaded we ought; but only because we must. So the other meaning of the phrase, "the

love of God," is always included in it, God's love *for us;* because that after all is the foundation and the motive of our love to Him. We love because He first loved us. Before we can love God, we need to have our hearts directed into the assurance that God loves us. Our love can only be the response to the divine appeal. If, then, heart-guidance is such a clamant need, if a masterless man is but a waif in the trackless wilderness of life, if the love of God is our very life, if above all other direction we need to be directed into that, who is fit guide for such a high task? Where is he that we might seek him, and find him?

It is Christ who so directs the heart into the love of God. He is the Master of the human heart. That He does so direct men, we know by experience, or can know. He is our Mediator, our Guide to God. Through Him we know what the Father is. By Him we have access to the Father. He directs our blundering steps, and leads us, if we will submit to His guidance, straight into the heart of God. We need not ask now how He does it, by what strange magic He masters men, and brings them to God; but we are assured of the fact. That He does it, there is the testimony of the centuries, the witness of the saints, the argument of our own experience.

Apart from Him we would be without God and without hope in the world.

Christ directs us into loving God, because He is the certitude that God loves us. He is our surety, the promise of the Father's eternal love, the pledge of it, Immanuel, God with us, and God for us, and so we for God. In this holy sacrament the Lord is directing us into the love of God. This is the subject set forth and illustrated. It is not *our* love which gives us the right to be here, it is our faith in *His* love. True, here at the Table our hearts are touched with something of the passion of love: they burn within us with desire and longing. But our warrant for Communion is not in ourselves, but in Him. It is on this we stay. Our own love is feeble and fitful, no sure stand for us at any time. We cannot trust our own feelings: they are fickle with the fickleness of our own weak hearts. We take courage not from any thought of our love or faith or goodness, but from the thought presented to us with such dramatic force in this Sacrament, the thought of His boundless, eternal love. We build on that. We comfort our souls by that. We get fresh inspiration from that unfailing source. It is His love spreads the Table. Here the Gospel is set forth in miniature; preached in action, not words; pre-

sented to us as a mighty object-lesson. Here we learn that God is love. Here we tell ourselves that the Father loves us. Here we see the proofs of that love, Christ's life and death, Christ's Cross and Passion. The simple symbols of Communion point us, direct us to the love of God.

And the response to the dumb appeal of the broken bread and wine poured out is surely love on our part. Surely the love of Christ constraineth us. Deep calls to deep; height answers height; such love calls forth love, the free surrender of ourselves, the adoring worship of our souls, the free outgoing of our hearts to God. Here we have heart-guidance, a stable point round which the life can swing securely, a centre of motion and of rest. Here we have direction, the control of love, the impulsive power, as well as the expulsive, of a great affection. As we take in our hands these sensible signs, may the Lord Christ direct our hearts into the love of God. That is the heart of the Sacrament.

## XII

## THE PATIENCE OF CHRIST

*The Lord direct your hearts into the patience of Christ.*—
2 Thessalonians iii. 5.

St. Paul's prescription to abate the fever of mind in the Thessalonian Church concerning the Second Coming of Christ, is that their hearts should be directed into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ. Such love and such patience would calm them and steady them, and make them ashamed of their uncontrolled excitement and their neglect of duty. They thought that Christ was about to come, and so they imagined they did not need to continue at their ordinary tasks, and debauched themselves with religious speculations. But if their hearts were directed into the deepest things in religion, the effect would be precisely the opposite. They would understand the discipline of work, the purpose of probation. If their hearts were directed into the love of God, they would not get wild with excitement, even if the end of the world were at hand. If they were

following the patience of Christ, it would not matter how long delayed His Coming was. The Apostle points them to a spiritual preparation for the Advent about which they are so concerned. With the love of God they will not fear the future. With the patience of Christ they will not neglect the present.

We saw how Christ, the Son, directs men into the Father's love, and what a power over the life such heart-guidance is. We will consider now specially the last section of the prayer, that their hearts may be directed into the patience of Christ. How appropriate this wish was at the time and for the particular dangers which menaced the Church! They had lost their balance by the mere thought that Christ was soon to come. The temptation would then emerge to say with the sceptic, "Where is the promise of His coming?" St. Paul, as the answer to both these extremes, points them to the example of the Master Himself. If their hearts are directed into the patience of Christ, they will grow quiet, and only ask for a place to serve their Master humbly.

The Greek word, like the English equivalent, "patience," means more than what we usually express by it, waiting, lasting out for a long time. It suggests actual suffering, bearing up under a burden,

enduring against trials and difficulties. We usually think of it as a passive virtue, resignation, calm waiting for something to happen, as in Shakespeare's classic lines:

> Sat like patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief.

But the word has an active side, even in our common speech, as in the phrase, a *patient* investigator, implying untiring industry. It carries with it the idea of fortitude and high courage, willing to suffer, to endure, working out great ends undiscouraged, without repining or fretfulness. Both the passive and the active sides of patience are seen in the life and work of our Lord. And St. Paul points to the completed character and example of Christ as the remedy for the fevered speculations and for the disorders of conduct, which were appearing in the Thessalonian Church.

The patience of Christ—what a theme for a sermon! It would mean the whole life of the Saviour from His boyhood to Calvary. We speak of the Passion of Jesus, and it is the same word from the same root as patience, and we limit it to those hours from the Last Supper till the end, the agony in the Garden, and the sufferings on the Cross. But

the Passion of Jesus, or the patience of Christ, was of longer period than that. What was His whole life but one record of patience? From the time when the first consciousness came to Him that He must be about His Father's business, He was schooling His heart into patience. It is the word which best describes His character, His humility, His self-abnegation, His submission to God, His composure of mind, His calm and resolute faith. It is the word also which best describes His whole ministry. Every step He took, every deed of mercy, every humiliation were illustrations of this quality of soul. One of the Evangelists sums up His work in the sentence: "He went about doing good." He took no short-cuts to His ends. He was working in the subtle media of human souls, and knew that the gains of character, the ripening of faith, the fruits of the spirit, could only come slowly. He sowed for an eternal harvest. His work was for the world. He came to save the world; and yet for the world's sake He rejected all easy and quick methods with their appearance of specious success. Though the world was His objective,—nay, because it was,—He gave all His time to the training of a few men. What a lesson to the fevered Thessalonian Church, to have their hearts directed to the patience of Christ.

How patient He was even in the little circle of work to which He limited Himself, going over the same lesson again and again with His slow disciples, unweariedly preparing that morsel of soil for the precious seed. Oh, ambitious souls that pant for large fields, that think your talents are wasted on your limited sphere, remember how limited the Master's ministry was. Is the servant greater than his Lord?

If here at this Table of the Lord our hearts are directed into the patience of Christ, will we not go back to our daily duties, to the burden and heat of the day, to the trials of our lot whatever they are, with a new resolution, with fresh courage, with renewed faith, with a consuming desire to do the will of God in the place where we are? What can we think of at such a time as this more worthy of our attention than this crowning quality of our Lord's life and work? If but our hearts are directed into this, we will rise from His Table with a keener zest for service, a sincerer longing to be like Him whom our soul loves.

Take the deeper note of meaning in the word than even this wonderful humility and patient working, the note of *suffering* which the word carries. The Passion of Jesus, the patience of Christ. May we

not ourselves pray that our hearts be directed into this, as we look upon the tokens of body broken and blood shed? Who can fathom what the patience of Christ was? We only know that it was there from the beginning. The *via dolorosa* was only typical of His whole walk through life, and not merely the tragic road from the Judgment Hall to the Cross. What buffetings of soul harder than the buffetings on the cheek by the brutal soldiery! What sorrow of heart for sin, and anguish of pity for sinners, keener than nails in palms and feet! He endured the contradictions of sinners against Himself. He who knew no sin was made sin. He, the Captain of our salvation, was made perfect through suffering. Can we think of it all, can we take in our hands the symbols of the last great sacrifice, without at the same time our hearts being directed into the everlasting love of God?

But that love will mean nothing to us, and our love which we feel quickened at this festival will be only a fleeting sentiment, unless our hearts are also fired with the longing and the resolve to be like Him, to have His mind in us, unless our hearts are directed into the selfsame patience of Christ. This prayer which St. Paul made for the Thessalonians, and which we now pray for ourselves and for each other, brings

before us the thought that our faith must be a life. It must be the Imitation of Jesus. We do not truly believe, till this is accepted and acted on by us. The patience which Christ showed is to be re-enacted by us. His humble meek temper, His sweet submissiveness to God, His calm unruffled faith, His steadfast adherence to duty, His tireless perseverance in good, must all be absorbed by us and displayed in our lives. We must so drink in His spirit, that His spirit shall blossom out in us and bear the same fruit as in Him. We must so become His, that He shall be formed anew in us. We must so feed upon Him, that we shall change from our old selves and be transformed into His likeness, till it is no longer we, but Christ.

Is this meaningless mysticism? Nay, it is the great Christian ideal, and the Christian task. So, this day, when we think of the patience of Christ, when we celebrate the Passion of Jesus, let us consecrate ourselves to Him, and as He has made Himself ours in privilege, may we make ourselves His in practice. Let us not expend the spectacle before us of the Passion of Jesus in maudlin sentiment. Let us pray that it may rather inspire us to the Imitation of Jesus. May His patience so possess us that every trial or temptation or untoward circumstance or

sorrow will be only a call to us to exercise the same work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope. Give the world joy, if the world wants that and thinks there can be nothing better; but we know otherwise; we have not so learned Christ here at the festival of His Passion; "Give the world joy, O Lord, but patience to the saints." May the Lord direct your hearts into the patience of Christ.

## XIII

## SELF-EXAMINATION: AN EXERCISE BEFORE COMMUNION

*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.*—1 Corinthians xi. 28.

Some flagrant abuses of the Lord's Supper grew up at Corinth, and St. Paul, after showing that such evils could only be prevented by a truer reverence for the occasion and a truer love of the brethren, states in simple and beautiful language what the Church accepts as the classical words of Institution for the Sacrament. He shows how this form of celebration had arisen, how naturally Jesus had chosen bread and wine as symbols of Himself, and that the first and chief use of the Sacrament was to be a memorial of Him. His disciples were to remember Him as oft as they did it. The Corinthians had been doing this unworthily—so unworthily that we could hardly credit that such an abuse could creep in among Christian folk. We can easily credit it, however, when we remember that when the heart goes out of a religious form, corruption is inevitable.

We are not concerned just now about the special unworthiness of the Corinthians. It consisted of an abuse of the love-feast, which in the early Church used to precede the Sacrament. This social meal sometimes became a scene of greed and selfishness, at which some paid no heed to the wants of their poorer brethren; and sometimes even it became a scene of excess and license. That kind of unworthiness is no longer a temptation to us, for the simple reason that the Church does not now have a social meal joined to the celebration of the Sacrament. But St. Paul, in his statement of the Lord's Supper, lifts it out of the particular into the general, so that it applies not merely to the special case of the Corinthians, but to all who meet to remember Jesus at His Table. He gathers up all the directions he had previously given, into one general rule: "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat." If the Corinthians had really done this they would never have committed the serious abuses which had desecrated the ordinance. It is a demand for more thought, more serious consideration of what they are doing.

It applies to us as forcibly as to the Church of Corinth. For one thing the Sacrament gives us an occasion for a public profession of faith, and that

is not to be done lightly. For the sake of the Church, and for the sake of the world outside the Church, and most of all for the sake of the name and cause of Christ, we must not take on ourselves obligations that we cannot fulfil. For our own sake also, for the sake of our own spiritual life, we must not lightly and carelessly partake of the mystery; for we would be only blunting our soul and taking the edge off all spiritual susceptibility. Because the Corinthians had not examined themselves, had not really considered the sacredness of the act, and the true meaning of the Sacrament, their religion had lost hold of their life, and sins had become common among them that could not have been had they examined themselves.

Now the chief thing is that we should examine ourselves, should be prepared to receive the blessing of Communion. There is no emphasis laid on any particular method of examination. You will notice that St. Paul does not give any particular directions, does not draw up a practical scheme of preparation at all. Any such rules would become formal, and might be a burden to the over-sensitive, scrupulous soul, and would only soothe the soul of the mere formalist into duller and smugger self-satisfaction. The truth is that there are no formal rules which

are of universal applicability. The things which are demanded are sincerity and seriousness. It has to be remembered, too, that self-examination has some dangers, such as a morbid introspection which is ever anxiously considering symptoms of self, and which deprives us of simple faith and humble service. Religion can have too much of what Shelley calls "the dark idolatry of self," which by idle self-reproach and brooding on the past can destroy not only present peace and joy, but also all right action towards amendment and obedience. I do not suppose there is any book so caustic and so searching in its dissection of the human heart as Jonathan Edwards' *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections,* and in the Introductory remarks of the Third Part he has these wise and sane words: "Although self-examination be a duty of great use and importance and by no means to be neglected; yet it is not the principal means by which the saints do get satisfaction of their good estate. Assurance is not to be obtained so much by *self-examination* as by action. The Apostle Paul sought assurance chiefly this way, even by forgetting the things that were behind and reaching forth to those things that were before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He obtained assurance of winning

the prize more by running than by considering." How true this is we all surely know from our own experience. Many of our doubts and difficulties disappear not by continual brooding on them, but by practical life, by forgetting ourselves, by the active ministry and service of God.

At the same time we are missing an opportunity for the deepening of our faith and the strengthening of our life in all good, if we do not use this occasion for true self-scrutiny. If we remember that no methods are prescribed and sacred, we will avoid all the dangers, and will receive the undoubted blessing that comes to all earnest endeavour after self-examination. We are not told what to read, how to pray, how long to seek solitude, and such other things that relate to method, but we need only think a moment to be sure that these things themselves ought to have some special place in our life some time, and when more suitable than now as we look forward to keeping the feast? "By all means," says Herbert:

> By all means use some time to be alone!
> Salute thyself! See what thy soul doth wear.

It must surely be all for good to know ourselves a little more nearly than we usually are content to do. We live so much on the surface of life, and on the surface of religion. It would be well for us to look

into our own hearts, if only that we may be sure of our weakness and sinfulness and our absolute need of God's forgiving love and mercy. It would be well to see what our soul doth wear, to see what we trust to, what we are desiring and needing and hoping for. It cannot be well to come blindly and thoughtlessly to join in Communion, as if it were nothing much, as if it were a form of little concern to us. Let us examine our motives, our conscience, our life, the sins that have hindered us, that we may be moved to repentance and to new obedience. John Owen says that "there is no such sermon to teach mortification of sin as the commemoration of the death of Christ." It certainly ought to be so; for what sermon could preach with such convincing power the tragedy of human sin? What should so pierce the heart, as with a two-edged sword, like the very spectacle of the Cross? The sermon is preached to deaf ears if we come to the commemoration in a careless spirit, unprepared, taking it all as a matter of course. But if we have given time and thought to self-reflection, to considering our state of heart and mind, and honestly reviewing life and conduct, our ears will be open to hear and our hearts to understand this and other sermons which the actual commemoration can preach to us.

The one central thought which St. Paul gives us in this passage as the subject for self-examination, is whether we are able to discern the Lord's body in the Sacrament. He offered it to the Corinthians as the test for them, one which would effectually prevent the scandals that arose through their looking upon it as merely a common meal. If they had discerned the Lord's body they would not have been so profane as to desecrate the Sacrament. They had forgotten that the bread and wine were meant to remind them of Christ's death of love for the world's life. If you discern the Lord's body, if you take the symbols for the spiritual reality which they signify, if you are prepared to renew your fellowship of faith and love, you will eat and drink worthily; for you will know yourselves to be disciples of Him whose you are and whom you seek to serve. If in your self-examination you see sin at which you tremble, and feel how faithless has been your life and how loveless your heart, come in penitence and humility to have faith renewed at His feet and the fire rekindled at the altar.

If you, who come for the first time to pledge your fealty to Christ, are anxious because in your self-examination you have found yourself utterly unworthy to sit there, that is no reason why you should

exclude yourself. Our one plea is our need and our desire, not our merit or our desert. The highest height you could reach would not give you the right to be there. Jeremy Taylor gives as the first ejaculation to be used on Sacrament day: "Lord, if I lived innocently I could not have deserved to receive the crumbs that fall from Thy Table. How great is Thy mercy who hast feasted me with the bread of virgins, with the wine of angels, with manna from heaven!" Not because you are worthy, but because He is worthy: not your love, but His love is your warrant.

If your self-examination makes you doubt not merely of having due preparation for the Sacrament, but of even having a true interest in Christ at all, what then? The Westminster Larger Catechism with great wisdom and tenderness states the case, and answers that one who doubts of his interest in Christ "in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it; and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ and to depart from iniquity." If our self-examination reveals to us our unworthiness and sinfulness, and leads us thus to commit ourselves more completely to Christ, it is the best preparation possible for the Lord's Supper.

# XIV

## SELF-JUDGMENT

*And Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man.*—
2 Samuel xii. 7.

The story here related of Nathan's interview with David moves us with the pain and the pity of it. There is incomparable drama in the sudden turning of the tables, not the artificial drama of the stage, but the terrible drama of life, unmasking the feelings and motives of the human heart, and touching the simple principles of justice that lie dormant in human nature. A year had passed since David's sin, and he had been able by some of the subtleties of self-excuse to dismiss it from his mind; till in this graphic way the prophet wakens his sleeping conscience, touching the sore place till it throbs with pain.

It was a simple parable the prophet stated, told in a direct way, without any confusion of issues, giving a case of flagrant selfishness, appealing to the

innate sense of justice in the human heart. The verdict of the king, when he heard the case, was instant, spontaneous. It would be the verdict of any man whose conscience was not utterly depraved. As each detail of the poor man and his one cherished ewe lamb is added, the impression of appalling heartlessness is made on us. The king's instant judgment is the instinctive demand for justice of the high heart of man. The pitiful meanness of the rich man's act seems an insult to human nature. And when the crushing retort strikes the king down with lightning stroke, we feel that no invective, no bitter words of condemnation, could reach home to the conscience as this keen thrust did. David's sudden fall from the glow of righteous indignation against the mean selfishness of the rich man of the parable, to the cold depths of swift self-condemnation, as the words beat back on him, "Thou art the man"—the story almost melts us to compassion. The mingled grandeur and abasement of the scene live for ever in the simple words. Our first feelings are admiration of the calm courage of the prophet as he beards the king in his palace; and pity of the broken man, humbled in the dust, and judged out of his own mouth. It is not the story of David's sin, and its punishment, with his bitter repentance, and ultimate forgiveness, which

I desire to deal with now, but the great principle of self-judgment illustrated in the scene.

The first thing that strikes us is the blindness and infatuation of the man to have missed the application of the Parable. It seems an almost impossible state of self-deception, which could let him flare out in indignant virtue against the supposed culprit, and never once dream that the case could apply to himself. But it is not such an impossible thing as it looks; nay, it is even one of the commonest facts of morals, and one which we can easily illustrate any day among ourselves. We nod assent to a general statement of right and wrong, accept principles, even give our unbiassed judgment on concrete cases that are mentioned; and yet never make the personal application. It was not rhetoric but a deep knowledge of the heart of man which inspired St. Paul's great passage in which he drove home to the Jews that they were guilty of the same moral failure as they charged the Gentiles with: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the *same things*. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should

not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?"

Again and again is the same scene enacted that seems so strange in this dramatic story. You can nearly always get the correct judgment in the abstract from men about any case of right or wrong; it is in the application we err. The fact that Nathan could appeal to David as he did and get the right response; and the fact that we assent to moral principles as we do, is only a proof of divine light that is in us as a broken light of God's own perfect justice. Conscience works out correctly in an abstract case, when there seems no personal interest. The case is put to David as one to be tried at the bar of his judgment; but as Nathan afterwards shows he himself has enacted the same mean and selfish sin, in an exaggerated form, which he condemns in another. Strange as the contradiction seems, it is common enough. When our passions and prejudices are not concerned, we can judge dispassionately; but in a case where we are personally involved, we make the worse appear the better reason. We find means to justify it to ourselves in some fashion, and soothe our conscience to sleep. Till we come to the bar naked, without veils and excuses and palliations, as

David was tricked into doing, we never do justice against ourselves.

It is always a sign of lack of knowledge of our own hearts when we judge self leniently and judge others censoriously: like the painter who was noted as a savage critic of other artists, when asked how he could ever pass any of his own work when he had such a keen critical standard, frankly declared: "I have only two eyes when I look at my own work, but am argus-eyed, have a hundred eyes, when I look at the work of others." This candid admission states the case in more things than artistic criticism. In religion we are, if possible, more easily biassed by personal considerations. The self-deceit we are speaking about would seem incredible but for facts like this case of David. It is not incredible to the man who knows his own heart and the deceitfulness of sin. David must have previously deluded himself, or he could not have been so insensible. He must have found circumstances which extenuated his sin to his own mind, by which he quieted his conscience and turned the page on his sin. We need not enquire into what these possible extenuating circumstances might be. We only need to think of the countless ways by which we impose on ourselves and take the edge from all self-questioning, and justify our

selfish ambition, or our spirit of revenge, or our covetous act, or whatever be the weak spot in our armour. We may have suspicions about it, but our method is usually like David's, to try to forget, by leaving it out of account, by covering it over as if we were done with it. We have laid it like an uneasy ghost, and turned the key on it. But the murder will out some day. If not now, the disclosure will be made, and we will at last see ourselves as we are. "There is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed, and covered that shall not be made known."

It is well that the disclosure should be now. We have no standing in the spiritual world till we see ourselves *as we are*. We cannot go on for ever refusing to face up to the facts, refusing to lay bare to ourselves what we fear to be there: like a spendthrift who will not look into his affairs till the crash comes, and excuses himself that he did not know he had gone so far into debt, and is surprised to find his affairs in such a bad way. The excuse is not valid, because the reason why he did not look into his affairs was because he knew that they were not right, and was afraid to find out. So, in religion men fear to uncover their hearts to themselves, because they are afraid of what they will find there. Their judg-

ment would be David's judgment on the rich neighbour of the parable; but they like David will not make the application. We are all right on the general principles of religion, but personal religion begins exactly where we leave off.

Our great necessity is to relate our particular case to the general law. It assenting to the judgment, which Nathan meant to rouse in him about the rich man, David was passing judgment on himself unconsciously. Till the flash of self-revealing light came in the prophet's "Thou art the man," he was blind to the connection between his own act and the general judgment. It was not that he had hidden his sin, and was hypocritically trying to forget it. It was that his conscience was blunt about it. He was not aware of it; the parable, closely though it fitted, did not suggest his own sin to him. He was not sensitive about it. Up till that time he did not feel the stain of it and the burden. The sin was unrepented of, because indeed it was *unrecognised.* This is the stumbling-block in the way of all amendment, that sin is not accepted as such; we do not recognise it; the word has not come to us, striking us dumb: "Thou art the man." We must discover, and acknowledge and confess our sin, before forgiveness is possible—discover first of all. Self-revelation,

self-judgment, self-condemnation, these represent the first task of religion.

Better this terrible exposure of David to himself, when the prophet tore the veil from the figure he had made to stand at the bar, and the king saw in that figure not some one he did not know, not another at all, but himself—a thousand times better that than that he should pass to the grave in smug self-satisfaction! Better remorse, and the slings and arrows of outraged conscience, than the blindness of heart which never sees the truth! If we would discover ourselves, and submit to self-judgment, we must give up trying to shift the burden elsewhere, which is our common expedient. Till we have done with palliation and self-excuse; till even reputation is forgotten; till the simple confession breaks from our heart, "I have sinned"; we are not at the threshold of personal religion. Till we have come to grips with self, we cannot come to terms with God.

Men evade this sense of personal guilt by many pretexts, as no doubt David did. We blame circumstances, our untoward environment, bad example, the temptations of our lot, opportunity ("O opportunity, thy guilt is great!" Shakespeare makes Tarquin say in self-excuse, after he had made the opportunity).

If we are scientifically inclined we speak of heredity; if theologically inclined we speak of original sin and the guilt of Adam's first transgression. They are mostly all dodges; all methods of drugging conscience and confusing the issue. We cannot hate our sin till we acknowledge it. We cannot depart from evil till we have it before us and recognise it, and know it to be ourselves. Our conscience is not awake till the prophetic voice reaches us with passionate conviction: The sin is yours; the guilt is yours; thou art the man.

There is a Northern legend, told in the proem of one of Hall Caine's books, of a man who thought he was pursued by a monster. His ricks were fired, his barns unroofed, his cattle destroyed, his lands blasted, his first-born slain. So he lay in wait for the monster where it lived in the chasms near his house, and in the darkness of night he saw it. With a cry he rushed upon it, and gripped it about the waist, and it turned upon him, and held him by the shoulder. Long he wrestled with it, reeling, staggering, falling and rising again; but at length a flood of strength came to him, and he overthrew it, and stood over it, covering it, conquering it, with its back against his thigh, and his hand set hard at its throat. Then he drew his knife to kill it; and the moon shot

through a wrack of cloud, opening an alley of light about it, and he saw its face, and lo, the face of the monster was *his own.*

We must learn that (in the common phrase which we limit to special foolishness) a man is his own worst enemy—nay, that the only enemy we have to fear is ourself; and that we must come to close quarters with self; for it is only

> When the fight's begun within himself,
> A man's worth something.

Rigorous self-judgment is the first requisite of moral life, to turn the light in on self. Socrates made self-knowledge the basis of all knowledge. A deeper self-knowledge still is the very beginning of all personal religion. Sanctification is only a name till we translate the general into the particular, and apply to ourselves the demands of the law. We need to cease to talk about sin in the mass and come to details, and deal with the specific sins, and unmask them. Many religious people are worms of the earth, with their whole nature corrupt in their general confession, and very fine gentlemen in detail—never dealing with self in any direct fashion, never hearing once the searching word, Thou art the man. "My God, I mean myself," said a saint in all the

general confession of the Church which is purposely wide to include all; but just because it is wide, men slip so easily through the meshes. "My God, I mean myself," though usually we mean everybody else but ourself.

We have seen how hard honest self-judgment is, and yet how essential it is. Essential—it is not only first, but it is also last. "For," says St. Paul, in all solemnity, "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." If we left the subject here, however impressed we may be with the necessity of self-judgment, we may be charged with still leaving the subject in the general. Would you then know the method, the infallible way of putting self to the proof? The method for us is this—bring yourselves, your work, motives, ambitions, inner thoughts, into the presence of Christ, and judge them there. He is the Light in this sense also. Until we make Christ our conscience, bringing everything to be judged by the Light; we will keep confusing the issues, and disguising our sins, and finding all manner of self-escape, excuses, and counter-charges. But if we will have the same mind in us that was in Christ, looking at the world and life and self with His eyes, we will see ourselves as we are; and when conscience says to us, in unmistakable tones, "Thou art the

man"; our one prayer will be not self-justification, but: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

## XV

## DIVINE SCRUTINY AND GUIDANCE

*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*—Psalm cxxxix. 23.

"This is the Psalm which I would wish to have before me on my deathbed," said Erskine of Linlathen—I suppose because it has such an assurance of God's presence, such an abounding confidence that man's little life is not overlooked and cannot be lost in the great wide spaces of the universe. But if the thoughts of this Psalm have no place in our life, it would be anything but a comfortable companion for a deathbed. For here is the thought of God as closer than breathing and nearer than hands and feet, with a penetrating eye to which nothing is covered or hidden, sweeping to the bounds of space, and searching into the secrets of the soul. It is the word of God, quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and

marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The Psalmist sets forth in poetry what theology calls the doctrine of the divine Omniscience. He believes in Jehovah, the God of all the earth, and therefore believes in a Providence so universal that it misses nothing. It is not an intellectual dogma to him, but a spiritual intuition. It is not stated as an abstraction of thought, but flows from the warm personal relation between God and man, which is the great revelation of the Bible. God's providence is everywhere, but it does not dissipate itself in a mere general supervision of creation. It is all-seeing, all-surrounding, all-embracing, but it is not diffused in matter and dispersed through space. It extends—and this is the wonder of it—to the individual: "O Lord, Thou hast searched *me,* and known *me.*"

The Psalmist dwells on what that means, how there is no limit to God's knowledge of him. It comprehends in its sweep every activity of body and mind, of heart and soul, of character and life. In the sphere of action there is nothing hid: "Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising." In the sphere of thought the quickest and subtlest of human powers: "Thou understandest my thought afar off." In the sphere of motive—motives which

are always mysterious, sometimes inexplicable, often mixed to utter confusion—the same is true: "Thou compassest my path and art acquainted with all my ways." In the sphere of speech: "There is not a word on my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether"—not a vain word or foolish or sinful word but Thou knowest its true meaning, the thought and intention which gave it birth, the object to which it is directed. Thou knowest it altogether. The strange and awe-inspiring thought is borne in on him that the God with whom he has to do has a perfect knowledge of him, that the whole life and soul lie open and naked before Him. No spot of creation is empty of God. Whither can he go from God's spirit, or whither can he flee from His presence? He realises the grand truth that he would need to get out of God's universe, to get out of God's ken. Behind, before, within, without, man is beset by the knowledge of the Eternal. "Thou hast laid Thine hand upon me," is the Psalmist's exclamation.

The practical ethical thought suggested by such a conception to the Psalmist is the question, how can God, the pure and holy One, with such an intimate and unerring knowledge, tolerate wicked men? He feels that God cannot but be against evil, no matter what appearances seem to suggest that God does not

care. The doom of evil must be certain; and so the Psalmist solemnly dissociates himself from the wicked men who hate and blaspheme God. And the conclusion is simply and humbly to throw open heart and soul to God, accepting the fact that He cannot be deceived, praying God to search him and purify him and lead him. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." If such will be our humble attitude and prayer, then like Erskine of Linlathen we may well wish to have this Psalm before us on our deathbed; for it brings the comfort of God's presence, that we have submitted and been reconciled to God, and there is nothing now we would even seek to hide; and underneath are the everlasting arms.

We have said that the feeling of God's omniscience and omnipresence brings to the Psalmist's mind the practical moral thought of how dreadful all the evil of the world must be to His all-seeing and pure eyes, and makes him long for a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. He feels he must separate himself from the wicked men who live in revolt against good and who hate God. But he is not content with such moral indignation against others. He is driven in to

consider the state of his own heart, and to be willing to open up his whole nature to the divine scrutiny that he may be purged from evil. It is in no spirit of Pharisaic self-confidence and arrogant presumption that he makes the offer to God. He does not invite God's examination of him because he imagines that he is righteous and will pass with credit. He knows that God, who understands the thought in his mind and the word on his tongue, cannot be deceived. He knows that he cannot escape from the divine judgment; and in all humility he is ready to submit in the hope that he may be purified and led. "That man," says Calvin, "must have no common confidence who offers himself so boldly to the scrutiny of God's judgment." It would be the presumption of self-ignorance if it were not a prayer for light and guidance. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Divine examination and divine guidance are the two petitions of the prayer; and the two are not only connected, but are dependent on each other. It is only the man who submits to God, and who opens himself up to the scrutiny, and who is willing to stand in the light whatever it may reveal, who can

be divinely led in the way of life. And it is only the man who really desires this guidance, who is ready to be searched and tried and known. We all, in some form, know and admit the value of some sort of examination of life, the need of some kind of judgment and test; and we know that life and character are weighed in some balance or other. It is, for example, not only religion which lays some stress on self-examination and self-judgment. Every sort of culture, every sort of proficiency and art and work, asks for some self-scrutiny, by which we may gauge our progress and learn what we lack and where we must apply ourselves. Religion also asks for self-examination. It calls a halt, and asks for the inward look. It asks us to consider, and examine character and motives and faith and life. In Protestant Churches the time before Communion has usually been made an occasion for some such examination. It is good once in a while to take our inner life to pieces, and frankly and honestly analyse its parts. If we did this with any degree of honesty, we would have our programme for the next months settled for us. Any kind of self-judgment is better than none; for there is always a chance of learning the truth, and of discovering duty. Let a man then examine himself, search and know his heart, try and know his

thoughts; and the chances are that he will find out something that concerns himself nearly.

But we do not need to be told that self-judgment often errs, and comes to a false decision. It may be vitiated by vanity on the one side, or by morbidness on the other. Everything, too, depends on the standard, the vigour and rigour with which the examination is prosecuted. By itself it may result in an idle self-confidence, or in an evil despair. Even when it is serious and earnest it may lead to the vice of introspection, which will kill action and destroy the will. Some men are always searching their heart and trying their thoughts, until the garden of their life is made a desert where no flower will grow. They may be so anxious about their motives that they will never do a straight and plain action. That sort of self-examination has its limits indeed.

There is another kind of examination we are constantly undergoing, the judgment of others. Consciously and unconsciously men are passing a verdict on us. We are always incurring criticism, the attempt of others to estimate our work and our worth. This, too, we know is often false and sometimes unjust. The judgment may be too favourable or too severe. The world judges results. It cannot take account of motives or even of opportunities. Out-

side criticism cannot avoid being largely surface criticism. In the region especially of character, such examination constantly errs. It cannot really search the heart and know the thoughts and try the spirit. What is easy to one may from temperament and training be hard to another; and there is not evidence enough for men to judge true judgment regarding the deepest things in life. On the whole, self-examination has a better chance of arriving at a true state of affairs.

But here is a judgment both from without and from within, which can test the life. It is to this the Psalmist offers himself, to a judgment that is unerring, a scrutiny that is both just and merciful, an examination that will set for him a standard by which he can examine himself. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me."

For one thing, this is the method of true self-examination, not to dig and quarry and burrow within, trying to unveil the recesses and corners of life; but to give up all our self-deceptions and simply stand in the revealing light. It is to submit to God, to invite and welcome His scrutiny, to lay bare heart and conscience and will, let them make what disclosure they may. In this mood of self-surrender we

are not concerned about saving our face, as we say. And we do not need to argue *pro* and *con* about this or that habit or practice or act. We do not discuss the rights and wrongs of this or that point of casuistry. We are past self-concealment, or self-abasement for that matter. We are there searched through and through by the discovering light; and we look at things somewhat with the eyes of God. We see ourselves with the mask off. Any wicked way that may be in us is not hard to discover then. It stands out in hideous relief and cannot be concealed. We are searched, searched, not by ourselves,—then there would be means of masquerade or some sort of concealment,—but by the naked, penetrating light which there is no escaping. When a man is brought thus face to face with God there is always some such self-revelation. He is searched and tried and known. That is the hope of the situation. Whatever be the instrument of such disclosure, welcome it. If it be fightings without and fears within, they are angels of mercy. If it be sorrow, then "blind me with seeing tears until I see." It is worth going through the valley of the shadow to come out at last to such light as this.

Notice further that the prayer for divine examination turns into a prayer for divine guidance. The

searching is not for its own sake. It is not simply to see even if there be any wicked way in heart or mind. It is to lead him into the way of true life. A danger of so much of our religious self-examination is to rest content with its own diagnosis. It can become even a luxury of confession. Some seem to derive a subtle pleasure in repentance, in calling themselves the chief of sinners. It is not a dynamic on the life. There is always something unreal in such self-examination. This searching which the Psalmist asked for was to lead him to a truer and purer and nobler life. The light that searched him became the light that led him, a lamp to his path. The divine scrutiny becomes the divine guidance. "Search me, and try me, and *lead* me in the way everlasting."

I do not suggest to you now methods of examination, what to read, and times and forms of prayer, and what subjects for reflection suitable to such work, and the things to examine yourself about—though these things have their use and their place—but I do not suggest these now, because these are not *primary*. It is not by method that religion is born, but by the open vision of God. The methods are well and can be used with success, only as this first requisite is complied with. All the methods of self-

examination most approved of by the masters of devotional life will not themselves lead a man into the way everlasting. The Psalmist is not thinking of any such methods, or even of self-scrutiny at all, when he asks to be searched and tried. It is the recognition and acceptance of God that he feels is the important thing. He knows that, whether he will or not, God is searching and trying him; and his desire is to open his whole heart and soul to meet with God. He would have God hold his hand and lead him in the way of life. He would turn the scrutiny into guidance; and this is done by simple surrender. To accept God's love humbly as a little child is to see the Kingdom; and to submit to the discipline of the Kingdom which searches and tries and knows will bring a man to the joy and peace of the Kingdom, and will lead him in the way everlasting. It is a variant of the sweet and beautiful promise, which has been fulfilled in countless lives: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

## XVI

## A PATTERN OF GOOD WORKS

*In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works.*—Titus ii. 7.

In this section of the Epistle are directions to Titus as to how he is to teach and how he is to comport himself, and the instructions are summed up in this counsel to strive to be a pattern. The Revised Version has changed the word into "ensample," needlessly, I think; for the meaning is quite clear, and the new word does not bring out the meaning any better. If the revisers had wished to be very exact they might have used the Greek word, which is "type." Shew thyself a type of good works. But the word "type" in English has so many varied meanings, that nothing could better the word "pattern" in this connection. Type, in the sense of the word here, means a definite standard, and so an exemplar or model or pattern; as when we say that Hamlet is the highest *type* of philosophical tragedy. A type in this sense is a characteristic embodiment of the particular class. So, Titus is called to represent the

Christian life, to show the type of character and conduct which the Christian faith creates.

Pattern is thus a very good translation of the word, and in itself is very interesting. It is a form of the word "patron," and came to mean what it does because a patron is one who stands in a relation of superiority like that of father, from which indeed the word comes farther back; and so a pattern or patron is one whose conduct and tone are likely to be imitated. Thus the word pattern came to be used for a model to be copied, or a design to be carried out in a manufacture, as the pattern in machinery. When we speak of a man being a pattern we mean that he is worthy of imitation, that he is a good example to be followed. He is a model of life and conduct. If Titus show himself a pattern in the Apostle's injunction, his life will be something to be closely followed as a model. We commonly use similar phrases, like a "model of generosity," a "pattern of virtue." So Titus, the teacher, is to teach and live that in all things he may show himself a pattern of good works.

The object of this circumspection is that the Gospel may be commended and that no one may have any evil thing to say of the faith. There is something in the wise word of the Proverb: "When a

man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Men, after all, are compelled to respect the upright, honourable man. They are forced to value his goodness. A good man wins over other men, at least to let him live in peace. And even if this is not always so,—as, alas! it is not, else how should the early Christians have suffered such cruel persecution?—the great point of the Apostle is that by a consistent walk and conversation enemies may not get a handle against their religion.

It is a solemn trust that is given to us to walk worthy of our vocation. At the Mount of Communion we looked on our Great Exemplar. We saw His grace and loveliness: our hearts acknowledged the beauty of His holiness. His face was transfigured before us as the unearthly glory of the Cross illumined it. Instinctively we felt that human life is meant to be Christian life. The lesson of it all to our souls is the word to Moses: "See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the Mount." Our task is to copy that pattern of beauty which our spiritual eyes have seen.

Then, we are sobered by the thought that the copy of the pattern becomes itself a pattern; for that is what the Apostle's words to Titus imply. The world

knows Christ through Christians. The Light reflects itself in us. The Light of the world said to His poor, unworthy disciples: "Ye are the light of the world." The Great Example asks us to be examples. The Worker looks for our co-operation. The spiritual effect in us becomes a spiritual cause from us. The Master said: "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you." And the implication of that is drawn out as in the First Epistle to Timothy: "Be thou an example to them that believe in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity." This day the Pattern was shown to us in the Mount. And the practical conclusion to each soul is the summons: "Show thyself a pattern of good works."

It is a terrible responsibility that the pattern is judged by the copies of it. We say that it is unreasonable that men should reject Christ because of His unworthy disciples, that it is very bad logic for men to give religion the go-by because of the objectionable specimens of religious people, that faith should be discredited through such poor results of faith in the lives of believers. In a sense, it is very bad logic indeed; for it is judging without looking at the very thing to be judged: namely, Christ Himself; but it is very natural logic, we must own. It

is after all not so unreasonable to form an opinion of a pattern by an ostensible copy. And indeed it is our Lord's own test for faith: "By their fruits ye shall know them." Whatever we may say about the popular logic, we have the fact that Christ is judged by Christians, and that explains the insistence with which the Apostle fastens responsibility on representative Christians like Timothy and Titus, since they stand as examples, typical of what the Christian faith produces. We, too, must take account of this. It is a fact of history that a religion makes ground according to the kind of pattern it sets forth, according to the type of life it creates. The early Christian faith swept the world by palpably displaying its magnificent type of life. It confidently pointed to the fruits of honour and probity, of courage and endurance, of love and self-sacrifice, of self-control and purity. There is the pattern, it said boldly; look at it, examine it closely, judge ye. They were not afraid to make the challenge; and as a fact of history it was this that carried the faith in triumph. Men felt the powerful logic of Christian life who would have been deaf to the logic of Christian argument.

It is so still. There is no arguing against the sweet and winsome fruits of the Spirit. They tell

their own tale and preach their own sermon. "Christianity," says the historian Froude, "has abler advocates than its professed defenders, in those quiet and humble men and women who in the light of it and the strength of it live holy, beautiful, and self-denying lives. The God that answers by fire is the God whom mankind will acknowledge; and so long as the fruits of the Spirit continue to be visible in charity, in self-sacrifice, in those graces which raise human creatures above themselves, thoughtful persons will remain convinced that with them in some form or other is the secret of truth." If Christians, the salt of the earth, have not lost their savour; if Christians, the light of the world, still give out the self-attesting flame; if grace is seen in the trophies of grace, the faith must move to ever larger dominion, and must take ever deeper hold. Men will bow in mute assent to the God that answers by fire.

What have we to say to this burden which the Master puts on us to show ourselves patterns of good works that men may have no evil thing to say of us—and of Him? What kind of judgment will men form of Him from what they see of us? Are we satisfied that the copy does justice to the pattern shown to us in the Mount? Do we take our

responsibility in this matter seriously enough? Have we accepted the dread gift of influence with due solemnity? We are always influencing others for good or evil. We are affecting the environment of other human souls. For some, at least, we are patterns to be imitated, but of what sort? In what direction does our influence tell? We cannot creep out of responsibility, and pretend to ourselves that what we are cannot matter much to any. There is a humility which is only cowardice, a common enough humility which makes a man shelter himself behind a confession of obscurity and insignificance. It is not for me this solemn warning, we say; I do not count and do not want to count: the warning is for the high-priests, for those in lofty station or place of wide influence, for those of commanding authority who are able to affect a large circle. Yes, for them—and for you. There is no getting away from responsibility, still less if this day you have named the name of Jesus and humbly confessed yourself one of this Man's disciples. The appeal is not confined to official Christians, like Timothy and Titus, or to men whose position or talents give weight to their profession, but it embraces all who are named by His name.

Let me particularise briefly in one or two lines

of influence which will show your paramount responsibility. There is the *home,* for instance. It may mean much for religion that a man like Mr. Gladstone, who wielded such power, should be seen to have lived a life of humble faith and constant prayer. It helps to purify and inspire our whole public life when a man who was Prime Minister of Great Britain should witness for religion. But any such influence as that is dim and weak within the doors of your home compared with the power you exercise. It is far away at the best, thrown from a distance; but yours is intimate, and personal, and continuous. It plays upon the lives of the home without ceasing, suggesting, directing, controlling. You are a pattern that is being imitated unconsciously. This subtle influence of spiritual environment cannot be overestimated. It is making character and forming souls, giving the bent and colour and tone to life. It is also the most far-reaching of all influence, affecting the very life of the world; for the whole social structure has its foundation on the home. What, then, of that sacred sphere, where no other outside influence can compete with yours for a moment? There, at least, you are a pattern assiduously copied, and what you are and what you do are woven into the warp and woof of other lives.

Take another sphere of influence which usually succeeds to that of the home, and is only second to it in its intimate effects—*friendship*. It is a gift to you, but, like other gifts, has its price. There is no need to try to prove to you the fact of influence here: you just need to think to admit it. You must know how associates affect each other, how the attitude of a friend's mind and the quality of his life will unconsciously become part of another's spiritual environment. Have you used your influence for the best ends, realising that you were ever showing a pattern that was bound to be more or less imitated? There is a wise word from the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus: "He that feareth the Lord directeth his friendship aright; for as he is, so is his neighbour also."

In all other social connections, though not so intimate as these, the same truth holds good—comradeship at work, fellowship in the Church, or whatever be the relation we enter into with others. We have a charge to keep in all, and in a very real sense have a cure of souls. We have to consider not merely how our conduct appeals to our conscience, but how it affects others. We can never get away from our influence.

What is the preacher driving at? For one thing,

driving you out of any hole or corner in which you would hide yourself from admitting your responsibility for the lives and souls of others. It works in all sort of ways, and you cannot escape. I know men who have laxer views on some subjects than I have,—Sabbath-keeping, for instance,—but who yet have refused to use what they claim as their liberty, because they see possible dangers of being misunderstood or wounding other consciences or unwittingly leading astray some who have not the same religious convictions. For example's sake they have given up their liberty. I say it is a Christian attitude. If it errs, it errs on the safe side. Christ never spoke such severe words as of those who put stumbling-blocks in the way of men. "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones, which believe on me, to stumble, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea." Yea, better there than sunk in the depths of Thy displeasure, O loving Christ! Better never to have been born than that!

"In all things show thyself a pattern of good works." The danger of a long series of patterns without consulting the original, is that errors are perpetuated. For instance, in the copying of

manuscripts, every mistake by a scribe is carefully repeated by successive scribes and added to. The copy of a copy of a copy gathers an accumulating accretion of errors. Correction is supplied by going back to the original, which is not always available, as in the manuscripts of the New Testament. But here we can go back to the Fountainhead. A young Jewess, who is now a Christian, asked the lady who had instructed her in the Gospel to read history with her, "because," she said, "I have been reading the Gospels and I am puzzled. I want to know when Christians began to be so different from Christ." The whole condition of the Church and the world is explained by that. Christians are so different from Christ.

We must take no other pattern but the original. Back to Christ, past Church and Sacraments, past priests and creeds, past Paul himself and the Apostles; we would see Jesus. And if you have stumbled at some of the unworthy copies, go to the first Pattern and Exemplar. We must let no man come between us and the direct heavenly vision. We must take no other pattern but the pattern showed to us in the Mount. We must go straight back to the original. We must enter into spiritual communion and learn the mind of Christ at first hand. The

branch must abide in the vine, if it would bear the vine's proud fruitage. We must abide in Christ, if we would take on His character and show a true copy of the heavenly pattern, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

## XVII

## THE SIGN OF CHRIST

*Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from Thee. But He answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall be no sign given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonas.*—MATTHEW xii. 38.

We might gather from its source as coming from the Pharisees that this question had a malicious purpose, to undermine the authority of the new Teacher with the people by asking from Him what He could not, or would not, perform. But from the historical connection in which the Evangelists place it the purpose was not only malicious but almost insulting. Our Lord had in the pursuit of His beneficent healing ministry cured suffering men; and the Pharisees' explanation was that He had power from an evil source. He did it, they asserted, by virtue of His connection with Beelzebub, the prince of devils. And now after this explanation of the signs and wonders Jesus did among men, they come with the insulting question: Master, we would see a sign from Thee.

What sort of sign did they want and what sort of evidence could convince them, if they could attribute His healing ministry to a diabolic origin? The veiled insult of the demand is the supercilious passing over of all He had been and done as if it did not count, and as if He must now do something of sufficient magnitude to convince them that His pretensions were trustworthy.

There is a demand for evidence which is legitimate, nay, which is necessary for the highest faith. But in this case, apart from the hypocrisy of the question, there underlay it a wrong conception of revelation, and a wrong conception of the nature and place of miracle. They wanted Christ to perform some prodigy, as if a piece of wonder-working could be real evidence of spiritual things. That this is so was shown by the severity of Christ's reproach: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." This phrase is to be interpreted in its common Old Testament sense, meaning the turning away of the soul of man from its rightful allegiance and love to God. It is a *religious* rebuke. God should be recognised for what He is, and the recognition of Him should not be dependent on external signs, which in themselves have no spiritual significance. Christ's feeling regarding this is seen from

a graphic touch recorded by St. Mark, who writes that when the Pharisees came seeking a sign from heaven, "Jesus sighed deeply in His spirit." It showed a lamentable crassness and dulness of soul to think that the recognition of the spiritual should be made to hang on prodigies and miracle-mongering of any kind. There shall be no sign given unto this generation but the sign of the prophet Jonas: (that is, no sign at all in their sense of the word, no sign but an invisible one to be understood and interpreted spiritually).

This attitude of our Lord is not contradictory of the value He elsewhere placed on miracle as evidence. He pointed to His deeds of mercy to authenticate His claims, when, as in the case of John the Baptist, there was a sincere desire to know the marks of the Messiah. But His miracles were moral in purpose, to educate and reveal, not to surprise and astonish. He knew from sad experience that it was possible for men to believe in the reality of miracle, and at the same time lose all its true evidential force, even to ascribe it to evil power, as the Pharisees did. There shall be no sign given to the curiosity-mongers. There *can* be no sign given to those who imagine that the spiritual can be proved by the material. Mere wonder-working is no evi-

dence of the things which Jesus came to teach the world. Men are not to be led to God in the sense that Jesus meant by thaumaturgic displays, by conjuring tricks. The demand of the Pharisees showed a radically false idea of the whole nature and place of miracle.

The same mistake is possible to us. We make it when we think that faith in God would be easier to us if only some portent were vouchsafed to us; if only we could see some physical evidence specially designed to convince us. We fall into the Pharisees' error, and merit their rebuke, when we sigh for the certitude which we imagine would come from a celestial appearance or a voice from heaven; or if we could put our finger into the print of the nails. To understand Christ's attitude on this occasion we need to have our minds disabused of the idea that mere miracle, in the sense of prodigy, is evidence of spiritual things. Some miracles are signs indeed, but only when there is spiritual fitness in them: that is, when they are more than the wonder-working which the Pharisees desired. For example, our Lord's healing ministry was a great and constant sign of the love of God, carrying a revelation with it as truly as any loving word of the Master did.

This lets light upon the true way in which to

view the whole question. Our Lord's miracles cannot be separated from the great revelation of His whole life and teaching. His words and His works are correlated. The miracles are not to be looked on as isolated exhibitions of power, but as themselves contributing to the revelation. They were not signs, but vehicles of teaching. They are not signs externally attached to the teaching to give it weight and authority, not unexplainable occurrences testifying in mysterious fashion to the possession of divine power. They do not evidence the teaching: they themselves *are* teaching. They are parables in action, moral and spiritual in their effect, not evidential except by the way. They are an integral part of the revelation of the love of God in Christ Jesus. They have an essential place in the whole round of the Christian revelation. As fruits of the pity of God, as manifestations of the divine love and wisdom, they are part of the manifestation of Christ. They are not guarantees of His message, as the Pharisees here made them, but part of the message itself; as much evidences of God's love as His gracious, tender words are.

It is not that the demand for evidence is wrong. It is a natural demand that proof should be given of all claims. But we must make sure what really

is evidence. A miracle of nature is in itself no proof of a moral truth. And a miracle can never in itself engender spiritual faith—not if one rose from the dead would it necessarily imply the existence of God and the soul and immortality, still less imply spiritual faith. Of course it is true that every miracle was a *sign* designed to induce to spiritual results, to lead men to God. But like the teaching itself, they could find no footing in the soul of man except through spiritual susceptibility. We rightly ask for evidence—but what evidence, and evidence of what? We say we would believe in Christ if only we could be convinced—but convinced how? and believe what about Christ? Men have sometimes asked, with an injured air, why they could not be convinced by an unmistakable sign from heaven, why Christ, if He be what He claimed, could not break down by supernatural means the barriers of unbelief; forcibly open the door of the heart and find entrance? What would such an entrance be worth morally? The mere sensuous or intellectual gratification which might come from a sign from heaven would be quite outside the purpose aimed at by our Lord. What would persuade the carnal mind of the spiritual? Not the carnal surely—not if one rose from the dead.

Christ was accredited to His generation not by this or that sign or wonderful work, but by His whole ministry, by Himself, by His life and teaching. He Himself was the sign. If the sign of Jesus will not be to Jerusalem what the sign of Jonah was to Nineveh, would a moment of astonishment at some wonder-working create spiritual certitude? If the sign of Christ will not convince men of the eternal love of God, what sign from heaven will? In asking to be convinced of the spiritual by some impression on the senses, we ask the impossible. No sign can be given to an evil and adulterous generation, that is, to men who turn away in heart from God. No sign can be given; for the conditions of their recognising a real sign when it comes are wanting. They look for the wrong sign; they ask for the wrong evidence. A sign to prove the spiritual must itself be spiritual. If God asks from men love, will some celestial appearance create it? If God asks for the free allegiance of the will, could a voice from heaven, or a succession of voices, subdue the mind and capture the heart? If God asks for righteousness, the loyal obedience of the life to the laws of life, could anything material generate the moral? There can be no sign given to men who cannot see the sign which Jesus is Himself. He authenticates the spiritual to

us. Seeing Him we must believe in God, or if not, how could we be made more sure of God? Christ is the revealer of the Father. He is the sign and symbol and evidence of God. By word and deed and life and death He testified to God. He is Immanuel, the sign and seal of God with us, and God for us; the proof of the divine in our midst. There shall be no other sign given this generation: there can be no other. He is the highest sign, and if the greater fails, how can the lesser convince? As a matter of fact, Jesus has convinced the world of God, and is convincing the world. Through Him we know God. By Him we have access to God. In Him we recognise God. For His sake we love God. The vision of Him is the vision of God.

This generation thirsteth after a sign. We think it an evidence of our spirituality that we do so thirst. So we find many modern versions of the demand of the Pharisees, sometimes in the name of science and sometimes in the name of religion. We can even manufacture signs when they seem to be lacking. Sometimes a crude evangelicalism, emulating the stupid methods of mediævalism of which the Lives of the Saints are full, asks us to believe in the great realities of the spiritual life because of some material signs, answers to prayer,

providences which, however cogent to the individuals concerned, have little meaning to others. Or sometimes we have a recrudescence of the crudest spiritualism, spirit-rapping, table-turning, teacup-manipulating; after which the devotees go home feeling that they have been assisting at some deep form of worship—as if the melodramatic vulgarisms of spiritualism could prove anything but the folly of the race! Or again we have the same claims appearing in a more pretentious garb in theosophy, or Christian science, or whatever happens to be the fashionable form of it at the time, where esoteric mysteries of some kind are practised, the root of all such things being this same unspiritual thirst after a sign, after thaumaturgic wonders, faith-healing, and other things pretty much on the level of conjuring tricks.

All this is a sign itself, a sign of the weariness and despair and breakdown of blank materialism to satisfy the heart of man; but it has the terrible danger of introducing a worse form of materialism, deceiving the carnal heart by wearing the dress of spiritual religion. How unstable it is we see from the constant swing of the pendulum, now from atheism and materialism to the most outrageous supernaturalism; now in the opposite direction from ultra-mysticism to

ultra-rationalism. The cause of these seemingly contradictory changes is not far to seek; as both are really based on the same foundation, a wrong conception of what the spiritual is and therefore of what is true evidence of it.

This generation in its unbelief thirsteth after a sign. There shall be no sign given to it. No sign can be given to an unspiritual generation which would judge all things by material standards, a generation that is blind to the spiritual signs of which life is full: there can be no voice from heaven to men deaf to the heavenly voices of which the whole world is already vocal. If the spiritual does not evidence itself, if men will not see that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, if the sign of the Cross cannot convince the stubborn heart and bend it to acknowledge the divine power of it, if Jesus Himself is not seen to be His own sign and miracle, His own evidence and proof, there shall be no sign given—there can be no sign given.

Is that the last word?—the clang of a closed door in the face of a seeking soul? "Master, we would see a sign from Thee." That pitiful cry if truly asked, not as these Pharisees, but craving for spiritual enlightenment and communion, has ever been answered. Never turned He away an earnest, sincere,

honest enquirer after light and truth. He condescends to our weakness. When we cry, Oh, that I knew where I might find Him! He meets us by the way, and makes our hearts to burn within us as we walk with Him, convincing us of His love, convincing us of the Father. When the heart thirsts with a deeper thirst than after a sign, when it thirsts after the living God, when heart and flesh cry out, He shows us the signs of His passion, as with Thomas: "Behold My hands and My feet." He comforts us with the sign of the Cross. And before that wondrous manifestation of eternal love, before that revelation of the Father's heart, we believe and worship and adore and love, and say in penitence and faith: "My Lord and my God."

## XVIII

## LOVE TO THE END

*Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.*—John xiii. 1.

There is a distinct division in St. John's Gospel at this point. This verse marks the beginning of the end of the Saviour's life. His public ministry is over, and the rest belongs to the inner circle, the men He had been preparing to carry on His work. These following chapters record the private intercourse with the disciples. It is now the ministry of the upper room, and has a special gracious revelation of love. The Master gives Himself to teach the Twelve and make them ready for the change. The teaching is first of all by an object-lesson, when He washed the disciples' feet in tender rebuke and in sweet unfolding of His own nature. Then He teaches by speech, disclosing the profound things of the spirit, with the gracious promise of the Comforter. The explanation of all that follows is in these words: "Having loved His own which were

in the world, He loved them unto the end." It is the key to His action of washing their feet, to give them a proof of His enduring love. It is the explanation of all His previous life, and of the death He is to accomplish soon. St. John gives us in these words the right point of view for understanding the true significance of all that follows and of all that went before. He was possessed and governed by love, the Apostle declares. If we do not see this, we see nothing and understand nothing. All that Jesus was and did was the fruit of love. He had loved His own which were in the world, and now He loves them unto the end. A Latin proverb says that the end crowns the work. When the Saviour said on the cross, "It is finished," His end of sacrifice was the carrying forward and culmination of all His grace. This supreme act is the summit and crown of all His love. So in Communion we take our commemoration of Christ's death as a commemoration of His love, that having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.

The writer, looking back reflectively, sees that only love explains all that Jesus did that night. He remembers how the disciples, as they came to the upper room, were heated with false ambitions, and were squabbling about precedence, so angry and

jealous with each other that none of them would perform the usual office of taking off each other's sandals and washing the feet. There had arisen a contention which of them would be accounted greatest, and no one would lower his pretensions by undertaking a menial task and so confess himself the servant of all. It was in a temper of self-assertion and in a mood of resentment that they entered the upper room. How can they listen to all the deep things of the spirit which their Master desires to tell them so long as such passions are in their hearts? That Jesus should humble Himself to teach them the lesson He did must have brought a bitter humiliation to them. To St. John it was a proof of enduring love, far more remarkable on looking back on it than it could even be at the time. For the shadow of the Cross was on Christ's heart, the betrayal, the desolation, the trial, the crucifixion, the crisis of His whole cause and Kingdom. The apostle sees on looking back that only perfect love could have done what Jesus did then, as He turned from His own thoughts and bent to the menial task. He had loved them,—that was plain,—and nothing had tired out that love, not their folly or thoughtlessness or selfishness. He came to minister, to serve, and He went on serving unto the end. Their childish pettiness on

this occasion only gave a gentler pity to His love and a sweeter and more patient tone to His speech. He does not give up loving because He sees they are so unworthy of His love. The shadow of their unloveliness only throws into keener brilliance the light of His love.

There is thus a contrast implied between the Lover and the loved. The nature and quality of Christ's love are clearer seen when we think, as St. John was thinking, of those He loves. Men love the lovable, what fits in with their ideas of what deserves their love; but Christ loves even the unlovely. The Apostle knows that, when he remembers what they were that night. It was the very extravagance of love that it should be so. And we who trust to His love and stay our hearts by it, know also how unworthy to be loved we are, and say, Great is the mystery of the Godhead in that God should so love the world. We, too, can come to the very Table with bitter and angry thoughts, with feeble and foolish ambitions. But we cannot, we do not, doubt His love. We may doubt all else, but this we know. "He loved His own which were in the world"; that He should love them at all is the mystery; but having loved them, all the eternal enduring quality of His love comes into force and He loves utterly.

There is still another contrast suggested by the words—a contrast between the divine love enduring without change or chance of changing, and human love even at its best fickle and transient blown about with gusts of feeling. There are so many false and foolish loves, without true basis, perishable because fixed on the perishable, with no permanent quality. There are so many selfish loves which fade when self is served. The very word love has so often been degraded and misapplied, so despoiled of its spiritual power, that we almost hesitate to apply the same word to such a love as this of Christ's, when the word is debased by its association with so much false and fickle and fleeting human love. In this respect, too, we must state it as a contrast that "He loved them unto the end."

"Unto the end," then, is the measure of the Saviour's love, and the word does not mean merely so long as He lived, but also means in the highest degree, to the very uttermost. It is not merely a measure of time, but a measure of the quality and passion of love. Not merely to the end of His life did He love, but to the *end of love,* to the limits of a limitless love. There are no conditions, no barriers, no limits. Place the end where you will or how you will, draw the circumference as wide as you may, He

fills the whole circle with His love. He loves unto the end, that is its quality. To the end of His life, the end of your life, the end of the world, the end of time—more than that, it is to the end of an endless thing, to the extreme limit of the limitless, the very end of love itself. It does not mean merely that He loved till He died, nor merely that He loved in the highest degree, but includes all that and more. It means that He loved through all that love brought Him, the humiliation, the suffering, the sorrowful way, the Cross. Love to the end expresses the height and depth and breadth and length of love; and that was how He loved and loves. Shakespeare, in the CXVI Sonnet, gives this enduring quality as characteristic of the highest and best love:

> Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds
> Or bends with the remover to remove. . .
> Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
> But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

This is the love of Christ on which we rest, a love that can stand any test and will not fail, a love that loves us the unlovely, a love that endures though our love dies, a love strong and true and tender, a love without limits, that continues to the uttermost. We can lean all our weight on it without fear of falling.

We can base all our hopes upon it without danger of disappointment. We can trust it without chance of its changing. It has no variableness nor shadow of turning. It bears it out even to the edge of doom. This is what we to-day assure ourselves of. Everything here speaks of love unto the end. The broken bread, the poured-out wine, tell aloud the story of love to the uttermost. We warm ourselves at that flame. We draw courage and comfort and strength from that unfailing source. We drink from that perennial spring. He loved—He loves—His own, unto the end. Sure of that, what else matters? And to be sure of it we take this as testimony. We take in our hands the pledges of His love, and we know that having loved He loves unto the end.

Let us interpret all our experience by this great fact, and how the whole path is illumined and the meaning of much that was dark is made clear. We will not judge God by every little unexplained corner of the road, but by the whole, long stretch of His providence. While we were in the dark patches we did not understand and sometimes doubted, but on looking back over all the way we see it to be ruled and governed and directed by love. The disciples might sometimes think they had reason to doubt the Master's perfect love. At this very time they

might ask, why if He loved them they should be bereaved, why they were to be left as sheep among wolves? His dealing with them was indeed marked by love, but was it all love and only love and love unto the very end? St. John saw afterwards that it was so, from first to last—nay, there was no last.

We sometimes do not understand the way of His love. Some passages and events puzzle us and alarm our faith. We cannot explain them on the hypothesis that they are the result of absolute love. Why should certain things happen that we dreaded, and other things be denied us that we desired? As George Bowen says in his beautiful book, *Love Revealed:* "He takes extraordinary liberties with us. Believing in His love and having our own particular conception of what love is, we settle in our minds that a certain contingency can never by any possibility be allowed to come to pass. Against everything else we prepare—not against that. We feel that it would be an unpardonable outrage to His most holy nature to suppose for a moment that He should suffer *that* contingency to come to pass. And yet that is the very thing that He brings to pass. We had boasted of the love of Jesus among our neighbours and told them that He would not suffer our brother Lazarus to die, but would assuredly come and

restore him to health; and, lo! Lazarus dies and is buried, and it is much if our sense of the love of Jesus be not buried with him. He takes, what seem to us, frightful liberties with our sensibilities and with our trust." Well, St. John did not understand all that was taking place that night in the upper room, and all that happened so soon after, but his final testimony afterwards was, as the final explanation of it all: "Having loved His own, He loved them to the end."

We have surely enough to warrant us in making the venture of faith. We do not need to wait till the journey is completed before we will own the love that has led us and leads us. We stand upon a vantage-ground here at our Communion Celebration from which we see enough to give us confidence. Let us take the love of the Table as the one central fact of the universe to us. It means that He has loved, why should it not be a love unto the end? Why should we not trust it utterly, and use it to strengthen and encourage and console every step of the way? It follows us: it precedes us: it surrounds us. It is sufficient for the day and for the night; enough for life and for death. Let us make trial of the strength of His enduring love, and it will endure in times of desolation, in times of trial and

of temptation, and in the last hour of the final passion it will shepherd us into the eternal fold.

In the lonely day of death,
When no man may befriend,
When the dark angel standeth nigh,
And the world is past and gone,
Let some voice o'er me cry,
"And having loved His own,
He loved them to the end."

## XIX

## HOPE TO THE END

*Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end.*—HEBREWS iii. 6.

THE author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is in this section contrasting Christ with Moses. He is writing to Jews who are proud of their past history and who are hard to convince that anything in that past should need to be superseded. Why should not the law of Moses be necessary now as before? So, one great object of the writer is to show that the previous revelation, precious as it is, was at the best not final but was imperfect; and that Jesus came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it. Moses was indeed faithful as a servant, a true mediator to the people, the agent of the old covenant to the Jews; but he asks them to consider the faithfulness of Christ Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant. Greater than Moses who was indeed a faithful servant within God's house, but Jesus is a Son over that house, whose

house or household are we who believe. The Christian faith is the final and absolute religion, the new covenant between God and man. Partners in that faith are the true house of God. Then follows the necessary condition of our being members of that household: "If we hold fast our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end." It is an appeal for steadfastness and faithfulness, the endurance of faith and hope.

This is a constant note of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "We are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." Again, he asks them to show "diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." It is a constant note also of the New Testament, and becomes more urgent as the young Church came to grips with the might of the world. When temptations to apostasy were common, when persecution arose, the keener became the demand for unflinching adherence. It is natural that stress should be laid on a steadfast testimony. Converts are summoned to hold fast the faith and to endure unto the end. It is not, however, merely a hard and dogged perseverance which stands obstinately against force that is encouraged; but an inward intensity of conviction, a hold of the central things of faith; for it is spoken of

as a joyful endurance, and (as here) a glorying of our hope unto the end.

The same enduring quality of faith is asked of us; and this is the pledge we would fain make at the Table of the Lord. We renew our vows and gather strength to be faithful—faithful unto death was the strenuous word of the early Church. The believing and hoping unto the end which are recommended to us in the New Testament do not mean merely to the end of life, but so long as faith and hope are needed, right on till faith becomes sight and hope becomes reality, right on as long as may be, holding fast confidence and hope firm unto the end.

This endurance and confidence and hope unto the end is the counterpart and result of Christ's love unto the end. We celebrate in Communion that enduring love, and from it grows, as from it alone can grow, our enduring faith. The Sacrament is to us the pledge of Christ's love unto the end. Here we assure ourselves of that, and are confident that His love has not failed and will not fail. Everything reminds us of that, and attests it. Every detail and action of the simple ritual of the Table bears witness. They are meaningless apart from this. Each thing and word and gesture is a fresh link in the

golden chain. The bread and the bread broken, the wine and the wine poured out, the Eucharist prayer, the very words of dispensing "broken for you, shed for you," all the simple symbolism of the rite, throws the Church back in sacred memory to the deathless love that lay at the heart of the Passion and the Cross. It means that having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. Our Sacrament is the pledge of the enduring quality of the Saviour's love. It is not any love or faith or constancy or hope in us that Communion represents. It is the offer of the Gospel set forth in simple drama, the offer of grace and salvation and peace.

But as we accept the gracious offer it means a tacit pledge on our part, a confession and a promise. We are parties to a covenant. It is the plighting of a troth. What have we to offer? What can we do or be in return for that love unto the end? It is that we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end. Enduring faith answers back to the enduring love. It is a reasonable and natural demand. The Apostles felt it to be so when they called on Christians to be faithful unto death. Could they ask less for such love unto death? The result of our contemplation of Christ's love should be a firmer adherence and a stouter testimony.

Christ's love reaches its true end when it breeds such faith in us; and our faith too has an end which it will one day reach if we are true. Meanwhile there is struggle and effort, a good fight of faith which has to be waged, before we achieve the victory that overcometh the world.

> Conquer we shall, but we must first contend.
> 'Tis not the fight that crowns us, but the end.

Is it hard to remain faithful, hard to persist in the Christian witness, hard to endure unto the end? Is it hard even to hold fast the confidence and the hope, not to speak of rejoicing in the hope? Is it hard to keep the vision from fading into the common light of day? It is; but just because we separate ourselves from the unfailing source of strength. Endurance unto the end is made possible, and even made easy, because of His love unto the end. It is turned into joy: the endurance is transmuted into hope. And why should we not trust unto the end and hope unto the end, since He loves unto the end? Our faith and hope depend on His love, and His love cannot fail. The foundation is stable and secure: other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. It is what we build on the sure foundation that tests our life, whether it be on

the one hand, gold, silver, precious stones; or on the other hand, wood, hay, stubble. If His love is firm unto the end, we may well hold fast our confidence and rejoicing of hope also firm unto the end. The one is the natural response of the other. Deep calls to deep, the deep of our need to the deep of His grace. Height answers height, the height of our faith to the height of His love.

Our Sacrament is the pledge of God's love to us in Christ; and our presence is the pledge of our faithfulness. By these tokens He assures us that He will never leave us nor forsake us, that He will abide in us; and as we take the tokens we declare ourselves His and that we will abide in Him. It is our part of the gracious compact, our simple acceptance of the blessed covenant. Courage, confidence, hope spring up within us as we think of His deathless love and as we realise His enduring presence. "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"; and as long as we never let Him go we can surely hold fast our confidence and our hope firm unto the end. He is our hope. Rooted and grounded in Him no storm can tear us from our foundation. So long as we abide in Him, we have His life in us. So long as we abide in Him, we cannot lose our hold. It is He, as St. Paul declares, who shall also confirm

us unto the end, that we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are His household if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end.

Our faith is not the condition of the Saviour's love, but it is the condition of our joyful participation in His love. It is not a condition imposed from the outside by some despotic authority, but a condition in the very nature of the case. It is not that Christ will not love unto the end unless we are faithful unto the end. It is rather that such enduring love should create in us enduring faith and hope, if we apprehend and accept the love. The love is there for us if we will, streaming over the world like the blessed sun. Here at the Table we exchange pledges and tokens. As we take the pledge of His love, we give the pledge of our faith and service. We renew our vows, glad to be of His household, and pray that we may so abide in His love that we may hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end. Having loved His own He loves them unto the end; and His own offer the frail tribute of their faith, and will hope in Him unto the end.

## XX

## PREVENIENT GRACE

*Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. For Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness.*—PSALM XXI. 3.

THIS Psalm is a battle song, a thanksgiving after the battle. It is full of the glow of triumph, the exultation of victory. The king, as representing the people of Israel, had led forth his army to what the nation conceived to be a holy war waged on behalf of God's cause, and so God had been with them; and now in the triumph of the return, the people meet for praise and thanksgiving. They say, justified by the great event: "The king shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord. Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. For Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness."

There has been a change of meaning in the word *prevent* since our English translation; or rather as so often happens in the history of words the meaning has taken on a different colour. "Prevent" means

simply to go before, and in the sense of our text meant to go before in order to help, to clear the way of difficulties, to anticipate, and prepare for the person following. We can see this sense in the beautiful old English collect: "Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doing with Thy most gracious favour, and further us with Thy continual help." Or in the CXIX Psalm where the Psalmist says: "I prevented the dawning of the morning and cried, I hoped in Thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in Thy word"; meaning I anticipate with joy, go forward in imagination to be ready morning and evening to meditate on God. We can see how the more modern sense of the word should have usurped the whole place, so that it has come to mean going before not to help but to hinder, to disappoint, to anticipate in order to check and frustrate and impede. But God's preventing, of which the Psalmist speaks, means His going before not in order to put obstacles in our way, but to remove them, and to put in their place the blessings of goodness.

There is in theology a term, still used, prevenient grace, meaning the grace which acts on a sinner *before* repentance inducing him to repent, the grace by which he attains faith and receives power to will

the good. Milton, when describing the repentance of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost,* when they confessed their sin and prayed for forgiveness, puts it:

> Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
> Praying ; for from the mercy seat above
> Prevenient grace descending had removed
> The stony from their hearts, and made new flesh
> Regenerate grow instead.

But we must not limit God's prevenient grace to the act of repentance, to the steps which lead up to the consciousness of sonship with God. When we do awaken to that consciousness we will, like the Psalmist, look back and see how God has been, in all the past, leading, guiding, guarding, shepherding us, preventing, going before us with the blessings of goodness. We have taken our place in the world, entering in helplessness into the country and society and family where we were born—and if we have any faith at all we feel it is *our place,* the place prepared for us, the place allotted to us, in which to serve God and do His will as we shall be enlightened by conscience and duty. We entered into life not only at a certain place of the world's history, but also at a certain stage, in a certain year of grace, and if we have any faith at all, we feel that it is *our time,* a time prepared for us. It was a year of grace

in more senses than we usually mean by the phrase; and all the years before it were years of grace to us, the prevenient grace of God.

How little we have done to mould our own lives; how much has been done for us. What have we that we have not received? Behind us lie the labours and sufferings and sacrifices of the noblest, and we have entered into their labours. We have a rich inheritance, which can be only described as the blessings of goodness. The tree of our life has its roots deep in the soil and the subsoil of history. We are not only the heirs of all the ages, but the heirs of God's grace through all the ages. God's providence is only another name for God's grace, and His providence did not begin to us merely at the hour of birth. Every prophet, and every man of faith, have felt in some degree at some time of intense insight that they have been under a foreordaining, a loving purpose before birth, before history, from the very foundation of the world. God's grace began with him long before he was born, and prepared his place for him, and went before him with the blessings of goodness. Time would fail for any of us to tell all that we owe to the past, all the debt in which we stand to preceding generations, not only for temporal mercies, but even for the very intellectual and spirit-

ual atmosphere into which we have been born, and in which we have been reared. We have a spiritual climate, as well as a geographical; and in it we have had our place prepared for us. The blessings of God's goodness have gone before us, and can in many lines be clearly seen by every enlightened mind and conscience and heart. The liberty we enjoy politically and religiously has been bought and paid for by others. The knowledge which we hold so cheap was dearly acquired by the race. Every advance in social organisation, which is to us now as our birthright, was attained at great cost.

Individually, also, in the growth and education of our best life, we must acknowledge our manifold indebtedness. A nest was carefully made for us, and provision was lovingly prepared; and surely in it all we recognise the gracious providence of God. Can we estimate aright what we personally owe to parents, teachers, pastors, friends? The purest-minded of all pagans and all emperors devotes the whole of the first book of his *Meditations* to a grateful consideration of all that he owed to others in his youth. Such humble gratitude is the mark of a great soul. He goes over the list of all who helped him by counsel or example. "The example of my grandfather, Verus, gave me a good disposition, not prone

to anger. By the recollection of my father's character, I learned to be both modest and manly. My mother taught me to have regard for religion, to be generous and open-handed. The philosopher Sextus recommended good-humour to me. Alexander the Grammarian taught me not to be finically critical about words. I learned from Catulus not to slight a friend for making a remonstrance." And so on through a long list of benefits which his sweet humble mind acknowledged, finishing up with: "I have to thank the gods that my grandfathers, parents, sister, preceptors, relations, friends, and domestics were almost all of them persons of probity." When we know what much of Roman society of the time was, and the character of some, even of the men he mentions, as history records it, we see that he laid hold of *the good,* and took it as a divine intention for him. Have we not cause to thank God that He gave us the opportunities we have had, gave us the environment we needed? We may have misused the chances, lost them or slighted them, but at least they were given us. Can we not see that God has been in the past preventing us with the blessings of goodness?

All through life, as well as in the beginning, is not the same true, if only we will look back over the way by which we have come? Every joy that

has come to us, every gift of human love, every blessing of our lot, every glory of our life, are they not all of grace, tokens from our bountiful Father, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not? And even in the things that were full of darkness, the things hard to understand, the very sorrows, and disappointments, when the light of life seemed quenched, have we not lived to see how purposeful they were, and how full of grace and lovingkindness? We have had many a Bethel in our journey, unregarded at the time, when we wakened to the meaning of some providence and could say: "Surely God was in this place, and I knew it not?"

More than once it has seemed to us that God's preventing has been a going before us to hinder and not to help. Obstacles have been put in our way, where we looked for a plain and easy path. We have been thwarted in our dearest ambitions; the desire of our hearts has not been given us; the request of our lips has been withholden. It has really been a preventing, in the modern sense of the word, in our experience. We have been kept to a narrow corner of life, when we expected a larger outlet. We have been hindered and hampered by circumstances. And sometimes it was hard to see that God was in it all, going before us with the blessings of goodness. Our

lives have been turned into lines that we little expected, and it is natural to think that if we had been allowed to go on in ways of our own choosing we could have made so much more of ourselves. But the more we know ourselves and the deceitfulness of our hearts, the more will we be distrustful of what we would have been and done if we had ever given to us the desire of our eyes. On looking back, we can say honestly that some of the times we have been prevented for our good. It may be that we have been delivered from evil by being kept out of temptation. Opportunities have been taken from us, and now we see that they would have been to us opportunities of evil. We can point to this place and to that in our life's history where we have been kept from wrong by being kept from the opportunity. We know now that we could not have stood the test of the thing for the loss of which we grieved. What we in blindness called hindering has been really helping. God's preventing of us was by the blessings of goodness.

Faith is of a piece. It believes about the future what it believes about the past; for God to it is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. We cannot live by faith now, and look forward to the fruition of faith in the days to come, unless we also interpret

the past by faith. God's dealings with us are consistent. There is no break in His providence. His grace is not intermittent. It is prevenient, as well as present. If we have faith enough now to look forward and to say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," we must on the same principle be able to look back and to say: "Surely goodness and mercy have preceded me all the days of my life."

The grace which we to-day celebrate is the grace which has accompanied us all the time, the grace of God our Saviour. We are no strangers to it. We gratefully and joyfully acknowledge it. When we look back with eyes sharpened with love we can trace its constant dealings with us, never leaving us, never forsaking us. The confidence we possess to-day is a confidence grounded on the facts of previous experience. Our future may be obscure; we may not be able to see very far ahead a clear path for our feet; but we know already what it is to walk by faith when sight has failed us. Difficulties may even at this moment loom before us; but there have often been difficulties in our lives which when we went up to them vanished as if some one had gone before us and cleared the way, like the women who went on their loving errand to the sepulchre of their dear

Master very early in the morning, with sinking hearts, saying, in despair: "Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away." The mysterious providences of God to us—let us joyfully confess it—have not all been of sorrow and disappointment. They have often been surprises of deliverance, miracles of grace and lovingkindness. We expected to be stopped, as the women did, by some unsurmountable obstacle, but when we came up to it we saw our way past, and even when it seemed to block the way utterly we were enabled to make it a stepping-stone to higher things. What peace this thought should give us, that God's providence has been about us all along, and has been before us, preparing a place for us; that our Good Shepherd has led us, and will lead us—no matter where if only He be with us. God's mercy has been ready for us new every morning, and no morning can dawn but that it shall be there waiting for us. Duty becomes easy with such overshadowing love; the future loses all terror. What can the future be but safe and sure, if God is preceding us with the blessings of goodness?

Even the valley of the shadow of death cannot bring evil. The love which illumined all the day of

life to us shall make our bed in dying, and in the eventide it shall also be light. Prevenient grace will not cease at death. Our faith fails not even here, and tells us that God goes before us with the blessings of goodness. "I go," said the Master, "to prepare a place for you." The forethought of love can never be exhausted. Our place has ever been prepared for us, and ever shall be,

> Yea, and past gates of death and birth,
> And the lost memory of the earth.

He has prepared our place for us at His Table. The broken bread and the poured-out wine are symbols of that love in its culmination, tokens of the deathless love of God in Christ Jesus. We take these signs of the love by which we live, the love which is better than life. We in this simple form once more give our hearts to that love, comforting and strengthening ourselves by it. Should we not make this Communion a holy Eucharist to ourselves, a Thanksgiving, humbly praising God for His mercy and His grace. Take this rite to represent, as it does, the Love of God our Saviour, and what more natural than that we should make it an occasion of grateful, joyous praise? Can we not use the words of the Psalmist with even larger meaning: "We shall

joy in Thy strength, O Lord; and in Thy salvation how greatly shall we rejoice. Thou hast given us the desire of our hearts, and hast not withholden the request of our lips. For Thou preventest us with the blessings of goodness"?

# XXI

## HUMILITY

*Then went King David in and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house that Thou hast brought me hitherto?*—2 SAMUEL vii. 18.

"IN the complexity of its elements," says Dean Stanley, "passion, tenderness, generosity, fierceness —the soldier, the shepherd, the poet, the statesman, the priest, the prophet, the king—the romantic friend, the chivalrous leader, the devoted father—there is no character of the Old Testament at all to be compared to that of David." All that explains his greatness, the perennial interest of his name and story, and why in all succeeding generations in Israel he was looked back on as their typical king and his time as the golden age. But in that catalogue of the elements of his many-sided character there is omitted a quality which gave balance and beauty to his character—a real humility. Men loved him for it from his youth; and it was the quality more than any other which made him a man after God's own

heart. He had a humble frankness and sweet simplicity of nature that were never quite spoiled even in his times of degeneracy. We can well understand why he should be a popular hero when we think of so many words and deeds of his touched with this strain of sincere humility. It is an attractive grace in a great man that makes ready appeal to men's hearts. Such a story, for example, as that of the well of Bethlehem, explains how he held men in thrall by the way he rose to an occasion, when he poured out the water got at the risk of men's lives to satisfy a whim of his. His nobility of nature was touched, and also his humility: Who am I that I should drink such precious drink? It is the blood of the men that went in the jeopardy of life.

And the religious significance of his reign lies along the line of the same fine quality. It is the evangelical meaning, so to speak, of his kingdom. He was not an ordinary Oriental despot, though he sometimes sinned the sins of such. He held his throne from God, and knew that he so held it. His reign was great religiously, because it always suggests recognition of, and obedience to, a higher Will and higher Law. David, though king, is not absolute in power, never claims to be irresponsible, admits the right to be taken to task, rebuked, judged by a

prophet. Saul's failure and David's success are here indicated; and in essence it came to this, that Saul was rejected for pride, and David was received for humility. He looked upon himself as viceregent for God. He had lapses and falls and covered his life with many sorrows; but always there was this saving grace of an innate humility that kept his heart green and saved him from ever being a castaway. There was ever a spot where he could be got at, where he could be brought back to his better self, and brought back to God.

In illustration of all this, one of the most remarkable things in the story of David is the way in which he yielded to the guidance and reproof of God's prophets. His attitude of humble praise on this occasion of our text, when Nathan predicted the perpetual dominion of his house, is typical of his temper at all such times. Some of the times were hard to endure and to curb the spirit. When the prophet came to speak of doom for sin, David, instead of bursting into passion or standing on his dignity, melted into confession and repentance and humble tears. It is the selfsame temper as is here revealed in this hour of sunshine. Here when the prophet tells him of God's design for Israel through his royal house, how He will establish the throne of

his kingdom, the story reads: "Then went King David in and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house that Thou hast brought me hitherto?" Instead of creating pride and vanity, as it would in a smaller, meaner soul, it crushes him to the dust, makes him feel his unworthiness, and melts his heart with sweet humility. He never forgot that God took him from following the sheep to be ruler over His people, and that all he was and had were of God's appointing. And every fresh proof of goodness came as a new call to humility: Who am I, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me to this?

Some men are made humble *through prosperity.* With many, perhaps with most, it is the other way. They grow proud and vainglorious and arrogant and self-confident under continued prosperity. A great advancement is accepted as a great acknowledgment of their merit. A signal favour is a signal proof of their high desert. Uninterrupted prosperity does often soften and enervate; but it need not be so, and should not be so, to a spiritually-minded man. To the sweet and dutiful heart its first message is of God, His love and goodness; and prosperity is accepted humbly and gratefully. It should humble him, make him more tender of heart, more suscepti-

ble to spiritual influence; for he knows how it is of the Lord's mercy, that but for the grace of God he would be nothing. St. Paul tells us that the goodness of God should lead us to repentance, the thought of God's daily patience with us and lovingkindness new every morning, should make the heart soft. Some men blossom out to richness and beauty of life under prosperity, as flowers grow in the sunshine. Surely there are some who are being led to repentance and heart-searching and growth in grace, by a sense of the goodness of God; some who are being made sweet and humble of disposition by the constant thought of God's tender mercies towards them; who ask after every fresh indication of favour: "Who am I and what is my house that Thou hast brought me to this?" Happiness should not separate the soul of man from God, if it be accepted humbly as from His loving hand and loving heart. It should make a man praise God for His goodness, and make him walk softly and gently all his days.

Yet, how rare is this humble attitude of heart, gratefully accepting the unmerited blessing and undeserved favour of God. Our common attitude is exactly the opposite. We take things as a matter of course, all the gifts of Providence and grace, all the blessings of our lives, all we have inherited and

possess and enjoy, knowledge and beauty and love and friendship. We seem to think that the common things are somehow not gifts of God because they are common. Even in religion we take everything for granted, accepting lovingkindness new every morning and faithfulness with us every night, just as our due, without a thought of gratitude. We are wronged and badly treated if we have not the wind to our mind. An ache or pain calls forth a lament; and all the joy and light and beauty of years go for nothing in our mind before this all-important ache. What have I done that I should suffer this? Why should I know pain or sorrow, and others escape? Who is David, and what is his house, that he should receive so much? Who am I that I should be passed over? We take all good as our due, as only our desert, and every ill as a desperate evil, as if we were marked out for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

We do not cultivate the thankful heart. When you have told over again for the hundredth time your tale of sorrows and complaints, is there not also a *per contra?* Count up your blessings for a change, all the things in your past and present and for the future for which you have cause to thank God. Tell the tale of mercies. Consider daily grace. And

should not our attitude every day be one of thankful praise and humble gratitude—Who am I after all that I should be so blessed? Who am I and what is my house that Thou hast brought me hitherto? It is related of an African chief who visited England recently, and who was taken to court and was at the king's levee, when he was asked what he thought of it, what was his deepest impression of the court, that he said: "I was most of all surprised to see myself there." It was a fine answer and revealed a fine and hopeful temper of mind.

But it is more than an attractive grace, very winning in a man's character. This attitude of David is the attitude which right through the Bible is demanded as of the essence of religion. It puts a man in the evangelical and spiritual succession. The opposite of this puts a man out of the great line, whatever be his other claims and graces. Pride is the first of the seven deadly sins. It may well be put first, because where it is all the other sins can easily follow. Humility is the chief of the virtues, because apart from it none of them can grow to full beauty and power. It is the beginning of wisdom; the threshold of grace; the very doorway of the Kingdom itself; the good ground ready for the seed that will bear fruit, some an hundredfold. It was

of this humble-mindedness and simple-heartedness the Master spoke when He made little children typical of His Kingdom. The Lord Himself was meek and lowly in heart; and this we have to learn of Him if we would find rest unto our souls. It is not an affectation, a pose, or a matter of words saying, in mock modesty, Who am I that Thou hast brought me to this, but these words must represent a real state of soul before we can see the Kingdom.

If further proof were needed that this runs through the Bible, woven into the web of the history of grace, notice how much St. Paul made of this evangelical humility. The Gospel, he taught, is to be received thus, and only thus can be received, of God's mercy not of man's merit, of grace not of works lest any man should boast. What is the great Pauline doctrine of justification by faith but another way of stating this same thing? If we have faith, it is because He has revealed His Son in us. If we have love, it is because He first loved us. If we have hope, it is because He is made to us hope. Redemption comes with the sense of wonder and awe, of unfathomable love on God's part, of undeserved favour. "By the grace of God I am what I am," said St. Paul, and the word and spirit of it are in direct lineal descent from this word of David and

the spirit that breathed through it of humble thanksgiving: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?"

This is our Thanksgiving Service after Communion, and what more fitting tone should characterise it than this of grateful praise? We must feel in the presence of such love as Communion represents that we have no standing except of grace. All our merits and works wither, as all earthborn lights wither in the blaze of the sunshine. We get past all thought of worthiness; for we know there can be no talk on that basis. We are not worthy that He should come under our roof. We are not worthy to eat the crumbs from His Table. And yet He brought us into His Banqueting-house, gave us to eat the bread of life and to drink the wine of His love. When we have said all, we just come back to the mystery of redeeming love, and we bow in humble, adoring praise before our Father in heaven.

We have said that one of our temptations is to live taking all the good gifts of Providence for granted as our due. We sometimes even live taking Christ for granted—never once moved by His life and love, never once broken by the passion of His Cross. But if we see aright the love that went to death for us men and for our salvation; if we under-

stand the sweet condescension and gracious love of God of this Communion Sabbath day, the word that will express our grateful, responsive love is David's word: "Who am I, O Lord God, that Thou hast brought me hither?" Amid the love and joy and peace and plenty of the Table of the Lord—I was most of all surprised to see myself there.

## XXII

## FEAR AND LOVE

*There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment (punishment, R. V.); and he that feareth is not made perfect in love.*—1 John iv. 18.

The test of the new birth to St. John, the test of being begotten of God and even of knowing God, is a simple one: namely, whether Godlike love is in our hearts. To him the line of cleavage which divides men is revealed by the question whether they rule their lives by selfishness or by love. The task of self-examination, to which he sets us, is to find out the root principle of our hearts, the fundamental ground from which the whole life starts. Whatever be the fine distinctions which separate men, a broad classification is easily reached by finding out the motive power which drives the life. There are two opposing energies in the spiritual world, and these are set forth by St. John as love or selfishness.

One has its birth from God, and is linked on to the nature of God, and to possess that divine attri-

bute is to have the whole being, and therefore the whole life, linked on to the divine. "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." The lesson of life is love: the test of life is love: the task of life is the perfecting of love. Life blossoms into its natural fruition in love, as a flower blossoms in light. To dwell in love is to dwell in God and to have God dwelling in us. And one result of love made perfect is absence of fear, confidence that both here and hereafter no real evil can overtake us. To be in God, to be as Christ is, must mean safety. The future, be it what it may, can have no terrors to the soul that is in the cleft of the Rock. To live in love is to be like Christ; to be like Christ is to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven: where is there room for punishment or for the dread of it? "The Lord is my Light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" The day of life is passed with a calm and cheerful heart; the day of death is welcomed sweetly and expectantly as having only more loving and gracious surprises in store; the day of judgment is met boldly and confidently, because as Christ is, so is the soul that is in Christ. Fear, which blights life and darkens death,

is killed by love, as the cloud is dispersed by the sunshine. Under this dispensation of love man is no longer governed by rewards and punishments, and is no longer oppressed by the torment of fear. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment." Perfect peace is the fruit of the perfect love. Humble, trustful, and yet triumphant life is the portion, and the portion for ever. A fearless, confident, undaunted life, possessed of the present, assured of the future, with no misgiving or tremor of doubt, walking with sure and certain tread under the silent stars and over the silent graves, facing the Beyond as the dawning of a glad, confident morning. It is the dream of the perfect life, the harvest of the perfect love.

On the other side of John's antithesis is the selfish life, individual in its scheme of things, concerned with getting, consumed with the unappeasable fire of desire, seemingly laying firmer hands on the world and planting itself more broadly and stably—but doomed to failure, outside of the life of God, outside of the true life even of men, spiritually alone. Fear is its portion, and its portion for ever. Love made perfect reaches out into fullness of life, a bold and buoyant life, with no boding of terror, but selfishness made perfect spells fear. Its logical conclusion

is the Ishmaelite type of life, a hand against every man's, and every man's hand against his. Peace is an impossibility. Suspicion and distrust are the atmosphere it breathes. The selfish life cannot look forward with calm confidence to the future; for it has not laid up treasure there. A loveless, Godless life lacks security. Its doom is itself, its narrow prison growing narrower and more of a prison as the material interests decrease. The kingdom of fear has no future for its citizens. And even in the present fear hath punishment. It ever tastes it in anticipation. It is its own scourge. The selfish life lives under a reign of terror. A life without God, a life without love, gyrating round on its own pitiful axis, excluding itself from the Garden of the Lord, from the Eden of man. It is the awful vision of the failure of life.

Fear and love—these are the two great motives of the world, the master-motives of man. They are the two great forces which have built up human history, and given all our institutions a place, and even developed life itself. Now although they are here opposed to each other and used to represent the two alternatives before man, yet it must not be forgotten that they are so only in relation to each other. They are both natural, and both have had, and have, their

scope and function in human education. They are only opposed to each other as a higher and a lower. They are different stages of the world's development, but to be under the dominion of the lower, when the higher is possible, means failure and sin. Most of the recognisable evil of life is due to this failure to rise to the new stage. Evil is an anachronism, a sad and hateful reversion to type. In St. Paul's statement of the antithesis, to live under the law was the natural and only possible state for the Jews before Christ, but after the new dispensation, when it became possible to live under grace, to choose the previous state was to him folly and sin. When our eyes are opened to a sin of our own lives, the thing which strikes us about it is its stupid untimeliness. It is born out of due season. It represents a stage which has been passed over in the history of the race, and which should lie behind us forgotten. It is so with fear as a motive as compared with love.

Fear is the first Primer of the race. It was the first bond which bound men together, bound them into tribes and nations for mutual defence. Fear had its use in early society, and even now in the first stages of individual life it is still a legitimate motive of action. The primitive instinct of dread has still

its abode in life, but it represents a lower motive and a lower bond of union among men. Fear made men gather together for protection, for support, and played a useful and necessary part in the building up of society, but if it is still the dominant note in any society it no longer helps but hinders development. Instead of being the inspiring, coalescing power it once was, it becomes a destructive, disintegrating force, fatal to social progress, putting an end to true harmonious evolution.

For example, this is the source of the industrial difficulties of to-day. If you have ever made a point of questioning both sides impartially, seeking to see the point of view of both, you must have been struck with the distrust amounting almost to fear of both contracting parties. Masters and men do not trust each other; they fear each other, ever thinking that each side is ready to take advantage. With what truth it is not for me to say, but this statement will be acknowledged to be the fact of the case by all who know both sides. And so we have the dislocation of trade, which is only the evidence of a prior dislocation of true human relationship. Men must learn that they cannot do even the world's business without God. If we are only kept together as a society because of the possibly greater evils of

breaking up the social bond altogether, progress is stopped. That is the stage from which the race has been painfully emerging, and we need the new and higher motive, the motive of love. Distrust must end in dispeace; suspicion destroys even the hope of progress; for "fear hath torment." All forms of disunion are of the devil. We simply cannot get on as a society by purely individualistic methods, jealously guarding our own interests, governed by thought of self and fear of others. Progress, peace, victory—industrially, nationally, religiously, and in every sphere of life—are given to union, not to disunion.

The part of fear as a factor in social development must become ever smaller. It still has its place as a negative force in keeping away any sudden dissolution, but in the higher reaches it is powerless for further development. Love must now take its place as the great binding force, carrying society on to richer and higher levels. This is the work of the Church as an organised body. It is for the Church to set the standard. The model for the world ought to be the Church. It should be an object-lesson of the spiritual bond as compared to the natural, of love as compared to fear. Love comes to her own, and rears her kingdom in the midst of the world's

kingdoms. Perfect love casteth out fear. Is it Utopian to think that this may be true of us in our business relations with each other? Is it the thought of a dreamer to imagine that yet the love of God will so grip men's hearts that the love of men will be the natural motive of all our action? Is it too much to expect for our society that fear may no longer have dominion over us, because self is no longer the ruling passion? Then so much the worse for your society!

The same startling antithesis of fear and love is seen in the life of individuals as in the larger life of the community. The world is a place to some extent of rewards and punishments, and so desire and fear are legitimate motives, but here, too, they are only lessons from the first Primer of education. Necessary lessons they are, but only elementary—initial, not final. To every soul of man the way to freedom is through submission. We must obey before we can command. We must submit to be ruled before we can rule. Fear as a motive can always be counted on to have its deterring, restraining force, but no life is safe which is only ruled by fear. It needs to be lifted upward and forward by the power of a new affection. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: the love of the Lord is

its crown and climax. Fear is natural enough, but in the perfecting of life it must be cast out, and it is only love which can so cast it out. In the religious life, fear has its function to serve. It drives us to self-questionings, to self-reproach and self-abhorrence, and so to repentance, and so out of the wilderness into the fold of love. When the perfect is come that which is in part is done away. It falls off as useless, driven out by the expulsive power of love. But how we cling to the lower level, and refuse to rise to the higher demand! How we wilfully remain down among the shadows, instead of seeking the place where the sun shines! How we refuse to believe the good news of the emancipation from the bondage of fear, and let it darken our hearts and lives! Even when we know that God is love, we will not keep ourselves in the love, and build our lives in the light. Fear holds the world in its blighting grasp. It is the ally of the last enemy, and brings its daily victims to death.

The world has always had its bogies, the things it dreads. Like everything earthly, these suffer the law of change, but the fear itself remains in some new form. The old-fashioned ghost, and the more theatrical terrors of the supernatural, have been exorcised; but in their place has come to a world-

weary race the more terrible fear of the natural, a strange dread of the facts and forces of the world, which work out their irresistible changes on nature and on the social surroundings. The fear of death does not, perhaps, hold its old accustomed place to-day; but a more awful fear of life is with us still. Men, who have lost sight of love in the world, the love of a living personal God, who see only the working of iron law amid the plastic mass of circumstance, who notice everywhere the machinery of rigid cause and effect, are naturally afraid of getting in among the wheels, and becoming the sport of unfeeling, passionless force. But love casts out that fear also. It recognises love amid all the darkness and partial knowledge of nature. It gives itself calmly and sweetly into the hands of the Love that rules the world.

But the commoner fear of life is not so much a fear which comes from such a speculation as that, but on a humbler level, due to the unknown elements of life and destiny, the seeming freaks of fortune, the appalling changes, the uncertainties, the unspoken dread of the possible. It comes from misgivings of untried paths, apprehensions of evil, heart-sinkings about the future, distrust of self. Sometimes it is not fear for self at all, but a nobler form of fear

almost born of love itself, a fear for others. Some of you here have whispered with trembling lips in the sanctuary your fears for those you love. Life seems terribly open to the tyranny of fear. Somewhere or other it can spring at your throat, if not at this turn of the road, then possibly at the next, where the shadow is darker, and the way is more lonesome. What a place this world would be without love, without God: a dreary waste under a grey sky. If the terror of the thought will drive us into the arms of the Eternal Love, it has played its part. "O God, protect us," is the pathetic prayer of the Breton fishermen, "for our boat is little and the sea is great."

My message to you is the good news—he that hath ears to hear, let him hear; he that hath heart to rejoice, let him rejoice—the glad tidings of the grace of God. Is it not a needful and a fitting message that there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear? The perfect love has its root in the love of God. Know and believe the love that God hath to us. Know and believe that God is love. Walk serenely in the light of that love. In it there is no place for care and no room for fear. Love, not fear, is the secret of life. Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Take heart of grace; God's love is the

heart of the world, the very centre of life. Live in the filial relationship with God in which Jesus lived, and at once you are emancipated from the bondage of fear. Christ's Gospel is the gospel of the grace of God. "Fear not" was a word ever on His gracious lips. A touch of His hand makes quiet the fevered pulse: a look of His eyes brings peace: a smile of His lips illumines the world. He comes to-day as ever to bring men to God, bringing God with Him. He comes over life's broken waters making a great calm: "It is I, be not afraid."

Under which kingdom, under which rival dominion, are you spending your life? Are you seeking for peace and blessedness in the natural self-directed, self-centred life? That cannot be. Or are you taking the manifestation of God's love in Christ Jesus for the comfort of your own heart, and reflecting it in all your doings for the joy of other hearts? If you believe the Love of the Father, if you live in it, if you seek to regulate your own life by it, where is there room for fear? It is cast out. There is no fear in love. A faith like this grips the quiver of trembling flesh with a strong hand, and fear is transmuted into love. However dark and tortuous the path, however mysterious Providence has been, however uncertain the future may be, all things work

together for good to them that love the Lord. It must be so: it is so. Lay hold of your faith regally. Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Rise up with the light of hope in your eye. Lift up your face with its stain of tears and believe. Faith shall live, good shall live, love shall live: fear and all the dragon-brood shall die. Take up the burden of your life again with courage, and let Christ's peace rule within. "He that dwelleth in the secret of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

## XXIII

## THE FILIAL RELATION: CONFIRMATION SERVICE

*As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.*—St. John i. 12.

A great discovery always comes to a man with a sense of its inevitableness. It is not its mystery which now strikes him but its truth. He wonders why he did not see it before, and why others do not see it. A discovery of beauty or truth, to the man who sees it, brings its own conviction. It becomes to him self-evident, not to be argued about any more, but simply to be accepted. This is what St. John felt about Christ. He saw Him to be the Light, simple, witnessing to Himself by His very presence in the world. He was there to be seen by anybody, who could, and would, look. The mystery to him was not that he saw the grace and truth and beauty of His appearance, but that any should be capable of not seeing them. That He was the Light of the

world, and yet that the world should know Him not—that was the wonder.

Especially was this the case with the Jews, among whom Christ came. They were in a peculiar sense "*His own.*" He was the fulfilment of all their highest and truest aspirations, the realisation of their hopes; they surely ought to have recognised Him. Yet His rejection was never so complete as among His own race. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Still, some saw the Light. Some recognised Him, and their hearts leaped in glad surprise and glad surrender. And as the aged Apostle looks back on what Christ had done for all such, he feels it to be this, that as many as did receive Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.

The Jews objected to this, that they were already the children and people of God, and did not need to become such. Our Lord had to show them that even their boasted descent from Abraham had no spiritual meaning, looked on as a mere physical inheritance. The kinship, with which religion has to do, is not a thing of flesh and blood, but of spirit. So that men can be in Israel and yet not of Israel. Similarly the objection arises among other than Jews that, if there is a relationship between God and man, it cannot be

an exclusive thing, but that all men must partake of it. To them it seems like an insult to the race, to speak of some *becoming* children of God. Is not God the Creator and Preserver of all? Do not all men stand in the same relation to Him? Are not all men the sons of God? Are they not sons by creation, by natural right?

This is true. In a sense, all men are sons of God. Milton puts this thought into the mouth of Satan:

> The Son of God I also am or was;
> And if I was, I am; relation stands.
> All men are sons of God.

The Bible also teaches that man as man was made in the image of God, that therefore the divine is of his essential nature, that man as man was made a little lower than the angels: and it is the fundamental presupposition of the Incarnation that God could enter into permanent relations with humanity. All men are indeed the children of God: that is, they have the capacity for the divine life.

But sonship by natural right means no more to men than descent from Abraham meant to the Jews, from the spiritual standpoint. The Jews, according to our Lord's teaching, could only enter into their inheritance by showing kinship to Abraham in spirit.

So, the natural sonship must pass into the evangelical sonship, or it means nothing except as a latent capacity; it can have no force in life and character. The fact that all men are the children of God means nothing in itself, if the spirit never awakens in them, if they lie dead in sins. We have lost our rank. If we are apostate sons, then to all intents and purposes our natural sonship is as though it were not. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." The one cannot stand for the other. We need to be reintroduced into the filial relationship. We have to recover our lost estate, and regain the privileges of sonship which have lapsed. True, this filial relation with God is our natural sphere. Only thus do we fulfil the true functions of our nature. It was for this we were made, as a man discovers when he once more enters the household of God as a son. We are living an unnatural life, in the truest sense of the word, when we are living away from God. We were born for the love of God, and when we are without it, we are orphaned and desolate in the world. Our highest instincts proclaim this to us. In our times of deepest experience we feel that we are akin to the living God.

It is related about a king of Prussia that he was

one day playing with children, and asked them to what kingdoms of nature different things to which he pointed belonged: a stone to the mineral kingdom, a flower to the vegetable, a leopard's skin to the animal, according to the old classification. "And to what kingdom do I belong?" he asked. "To the Kingdom of Heaven," a little child replied. That is man's true classification. That is his birthright. Our hearts assent to that ever and again with a thrill of agreement, in moments of profound feeling or noble thought. But we do not live as such. We seem powerless to rise to the level where this state is the habitual and natural. It seems more like a shadowy memory of a state in a far-off time, a time when heaven lay about us in our infancy. Shades of the prison-house have closed upon us since then.

How to recover that state of sweet filial relationship with our Father? It is our Elder Brother who makes it possible. He awakens the dormant sonship. He unites us again to God. He brings us who were afar off into the lost fellowship, makes us inmates of the household of God. He enables us to re-enter the relationship; gives us power to become the children of God. This was His life-work on earth, to bring men into the same relation to God in which He Himself stood. What God was to Him, He wanted

Him to be to us. What He was to God, He wanted us to be. He revealed God to us as our Heavenly Father. Sonship to God is not a figure of speech, as we too often make it. It denotes rank of nature; our place in the real world. It expresses what we are qualified by our essential nature to do and to be, and above all to become. It implies that we stand in a distinct and definite relationship to God, the same relation as Christ, a relation of dependence, but also of free and willing love. We enter consciously into the state of children when we awaken to the great fact that God loves us. It is the knowledge of that love, and the humble and glad acceptance of it, which mark the beginning of the state of sonship. It is the wonder and romance of all time and eternity that it should be so, but the soul that believes that it is so, enters into its inheritance of peace and love. And we who look forward to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to take in our hands the symbols of our Saviour's dying love, who take them as a pledge of the eternal love of God, do we not know that Christ has given us power to become the children of His Father and our Father, His God and our God?

It follows from this that the Christian life is not simply a receiving and being done with once for

all. It is a state the blessedness of which corresponds to the nearness of the fellowship. The Christian life is ever a "becoming." Christ enables His brethren to become the sons of God. So many Christians live an impoverished life because they make the beginning the end. They do not enter into the fullness, into the complete life of the Father's Home. They pass the threshold, but they do not enter fully into the family relationship as members of the household. To become the children of God is not merely an act of adoption. It is a continual advancement in the life of love, an ever-increasing knowledge of what it is to be sons and daughters of God.

You who come to take your place for the first time at the Lord's Table, God has loved you into life: your Heavenly Father has loved you through all the years of your youth; you have been baptised into the name of Christ; you have been educated in Christian homes and a Christian congregation; you have belonged to the household of God from the very first; but now you are consciously taking on yourselves the privileges and duties that belong to the followers of Christ. In receiving Him and His love, you realise that He is giving you power to become the children of God. You have awakened to the surprise and joy of your Father's love, and to the knowledge

of His claims over your heart and life; remember that the Christian life is ever a becoming, a growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Make this time of consecration a fresh beginning in all Christian endeavour. Claim your true place in every sphere of life as children of God; live as children.

The marginal reading of our text has instead of "power," "right" or "privilege." Christ gives us the *right* to become children of God. It is a *privilege* which we have to lay hold of. We talk of standing on our rights, often in a wrong sense, when we only mean that we are jealous of our personal claims to consideration, filled with a puffed-up idea of our importance. But there is a true sense in which we ought to stand upon our rights. We have inalienable rights on which we ought to make our stand; spiritual rights, which we cannot give up without giving up our true selves; this right which Christ gives us to become the sons and daughters of God.

What a power it may be, this sense of sonship! It may be the strongest motive in life. Sonship is more than a right or a privilege: it is a dynamic. This Communion, which is the seal of your sonship, is also a call to walk worthy of the great vocation.

Every right implies duty. Every privilege means responsibility. A privilege must become a power in our life, or we must lose it. This consciousness, which has awakened in you, of being the children of God, must be made a motive power in your life, an inspiration to make you strive not to dishonour the name which now you bear.

The duties which emerge to all children of God cannot be set forth in a list of precepts; but they are included in these two great lines of duty. First, sonship implies filial love to our Father in Heaven; and secondly, fraternal love among ourselves. This is the fulfilling of the whole law.

The root and source and foundation of our sonship is God's Fatherhood. Our Lord makes this the groundwork of duty. His call to us is to rise to the height of our own nature, to live in the consciousness of sonship. We are to love our enemies that we may be the children of our Father, who sends His rain on the just and the unjust and causes His sun to shine on the good and the evil. We are to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect. Life is to be a becoming, with the perfectness of God as the ideal and the goal. The Christian life is the imitation of God, as a son imitates a wise and loving father. Life is to be the expression of the filial

spirit. When we come to the Table of the Lord with its tokens of matchless love, and our hearts burn within us that such love should be for us, so that we say to our own happy hearts, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God"; let the next thought be, Behold what manner of persons ought we to be that such privilege should be given to us, who are joint-heirs with Christ, who have entered into the Birthright of our Elder Brother.

## XXIV

## THE SUBJECT OF MEDITATION

*We have thought on thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of Thy Temple.*—PSALM xlviii. 9.

THIS Psalm is a song of triumph, when Jerusalem was saved from some impending danger. The reference may be to the overthrow of Sennacherib, when the Assyrian army encamped against the capital, and then melted like snow in the glance of the Lord. In any case it was at some such time as that when a great national disaster was averted; and so the Psalm is a national anthem celebrating the victory. The theme is that God is the safety of Zion, the impregnable city, made such by the loving care of God. After a vivid description of the danger, when the kings were assembled together to eat them up, and a description of their complete discomfiture, broken and scattered as the east wind breaks the ships of Tarshish, the effect of the deliverance on men of faith is stated. It is accepted as a fresh evidence for faith. They feel as if they lived in

the great days of old of which they had heard from their fathers. Tradition has become experience. All that they had heard of the power and love of God, the wonderful history of their race with its providential guidance, finds new point in the things they themselves have witnessed. "As we have heard, so have we seen." The present deliverance makes them think of the many deliverances, makes them look back on the past and trace there the evidences of the love of God. The one token of love warms the heart to think of all other similar tokens. Into the Temple the joyful people surge to give vent to their feelings of gratitude and triumph. Where else can they go with such fitness but to the sanctuary which stands to them as the very heart of the religion? And what is more fitting than that they should before all else give thanks to God. Such deliverance drives the pious heart to God, to think sweetly of His loving-kindness. They go up to the Temple to think of it, lovingly, gratefully, humbly, prayerfully.

Shallow souls let even great events pass without real thought, without notice, without making them an occasion for going deeper into life, deeper into the mystery and wonder of God's providence, and deeper into their own hearts. They do not consider the true inward significance of what yet strikes them

as marvellous. Calamity and deliverance, sorrow and joy alike fail to impress them, fail to force them to apply their hearts unto wisdom. It is to live on the surface of life merely to plume yourself in the sunshine and shiver in the cold, to welcome prosperity and cower before adversity, merely accepting with appropriate feeling what happens to come; and never to ask the meaning, never to want to know what may be made of these experiences. To let ourselves float on the surface of life, like straws on the sea riding proudly on the crest of the wave or sinking dully in the hollow, taking loss and gain, sorrow and joy, merely as surface experiences without thought of what they should teach us, without seeing spiritual significance in either, without paying heed to warning from danger and giving thanks for mercy—that is a poor conception of human life.

Here in this Psalm, after the great deliverance, the Psalmist feels that the first thing to do, the first thought to think, is praise, grateful thanksgiving. "We have thought on Thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of Thy Temple." What fitter place, and what fitter theme could there be for the place? It was meet that they should go there and hush their hearts into peace by the thought of all God's loving-

kindness to their race and to them. And what fitter theme could there be for us as we come to take in our hands the symbols of God's love in Christ Jesus? Let us make our Communion season one grateful meditation on this grandest of all themes. There can be no better preparation beforehand, and no more appropriate frame of mind during the act than this. We come to meditate on God's lovingkindness. That sums up everything, all we would like to do, all we would like to feel. "We have thought on Thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of Thy Temple." We are looking forward at once to Easter, the day the Church celebrates as our Lord's resurrection, not as a fact merely but as a fact with a deathless hope in its bosom; and at the same time we look forward to celebrate our Lord's death, the first act so to speak of the resurrection. Both of these are occasions for rejoicing and for offering the sacrifice of praise. Easter a message of hope for a world of death; Communion a message of love for a world of sin!

One name the Church has employed for our Holy Communion is Eucharist, Thanksgiving, suggested by the words at the institution of the Supper: "He took bread and blessed," "He took the cup and gave thanks." Our common English word "grace" comes from the same root as Eucharist, and we have one

use of it which is almost identical with the first use of Eucharist, in the phrase, *grace* before meat. The word Eucharist became associated with Communion for the deeper reason that the whole rite summed up to the believer all the benefits of Christ's death in the Gospel, and the natural expression from us is simple, grateful, adoring thanksgiving. We come that we may think on God's lovingkindness in the midst of the Temple displayed to us in Christ Jesus. This is the one and only subject of meditation, to think on God's lovingkindness.

Where shall we begin, and where end? Like the pious Jews, who entered the Temple to give praise after their deliverance and were led back and on to think of what had gone before and what would come after, we have not merely one act of love to celebrate. Like them we think of the past, the past history of redemption, all the gathering spiritual riches of the race, the record of revelation, the history of the Church, all the men of God who walked with Him and whose works follow them, leaving fragrance and beauty for us all. And not only do we think of that larger past, but also of our own past. We have not only tradition but experience: "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God." We think of the lovingkindness manifested to us, and all God's

providence meeting us at every turn of the road, His gracious leading which we surely see in the midst of the Temple, viewing life from the standpoint of God. We think of the present and the future, how all our needs are met in Him, and how our future is safe with Him. In the light of the deathless love which shines through the simple form of this memorial rite, should not complete trust fill our hearts now and confidence for the future illumine our path? Whether we look back or forward, within or without, is not thanksgiving our appropriate state? "We have thought of Thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of Thy Temple."

What can we think of in the presence of the tokens of love but of Him and His lovingkindness? Let the breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine stand to us as they should for all that Christ has brought us, the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, reconciliation, hope of glory, all the rich and glorious elements of divine love. On these things we will think. All the gifts of bounty and grace are summed up to us in the unspeakable gift of Christ: all the tokens of love are summed up in the Son of His love. We think of Jesus the pledge of the Father's love, the promise and the fulfilment of it. It is to remember Him, to think of Him,

that the very rite was instituted by Him. When we come to the Table, we will think of Thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of Thy Temple. From the burning heart of love, shown to us there, we see love everywhere. We see that life is surrounded by God, that we are engirded, enswathed, encompassed by the love of God, beset behind and before. On that love we will meditate: on it we will feed: we will seek to get from it comfort and peace and hope and strength for new obedience.

It is for all of us; but you especially who come for the first time to enter publicly into this covenant of love, let this be your theme of grateful meditation. You have sought knowledge and discernment from the teaching of the class for preparation; you have examined yourselves, looked into your failure and sin and unworthiness—all that is well. But we come not to think of ourselves at all, not even of our sin, but to think of Him. We have fears and doubts and difficulties and temptations—and we will have them to face in the future also, but we put them aside. When we come to the Table, that is not the place or the time to consider them. We have but one theme, one thought, in the midst of the Temple, amid the sacred mysteries of the Temple: namely, His lovingkindness. Some of you wonder if you

have enough love to justify you in coming. But it is not our love of Him that is our warrant,—that at best is weak and feeble and fickle,—but His love of us. On that we would rest. After all, this is the heart of communion, His love. We warm ourselves at this flame. It is the way to kindle love in our own hearts, the way to increase faith, the way to aspire to all good works and service. It is the way also to peace. As we think of God's loving-kindness in the midst of the Temple, let the sweet assurance that this wondrous love is yours, offered to you, beget in you the happy confidence that you are held irrevocably in the hands of love: "For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death."

## XXV

## CHRIST'S CHOSEN

"*Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go forth and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*—St. John xv. 16.

Does this represent an absolute fact? If so, it seems to limit man's power and make him the sport of mere circumstance. Can we, for instance, blame him if he is not among the chosen? Is it his fault if he remains among them that are without? We touch here one of the stubborn problems which have ever exercised the human mind, the old problem as to the place of free-will in relation to divine foreknowledge. At the start it is perhaps well to remember that religion does not depend on our capacity to reconcile the great basal difficulties of the universe, and it is possible to live well without having solved the ultimate problems of existence. We may state this fact which our Lord expresses in these words in a hard and rigid dogma against which the mind instinctively revolts, or we may elaborate a theory

on the other side which practically denies the truth of our Lord's words. And so the wordy battle goes on.

Facts are of more importance than theories, and as a matter of fact it is part of the religious consciousness to ascribe sovereignty to God and to explain everything as caused by His eternal purpose. This is a definite experience which can be seen in the history of every prophet. He knew that there was nothing haphazard in his life, that everything in it was causal not casual, and that his work was no accident.

It is a fact also of the record that Christ did choose His disciples. Out of the company who were attracted to Him He singled the men whom He deliberately made the inner circle. We read that He called His disciples, and of them He chose twelve whom also He named Apostles. Later, when discriminating between the character of Judas and the rest, He asked, and in the question asserted His complete authority: "Have not I chosen you twelve?" Of course there is a sense in which they chose Him, but religious experience unreservedly acknowledges the profounder truth which lies in this statement: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." To the believing man his choice of Christ is simply

the evidence of Christ's choice of him. There is a calling of God to which the soul of man responds. The religious man feels and knows that it is all of God, beginning in His eternal choice, and kept right through by His power. The deepest truth of religion is that salvation is of the Lord. St. Paul expresses it continually, as to the Ephesians: "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. . . . In love He foreordained us unto adoption as sons." And to the Thessalonians: "God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth." This is the experience of all religion, bearing out the essential truth of the statement: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you."

Now, as a matter of fact, this is in line with what we know to be true in other directions. This element of necessity is in our lives. We were born into a country and environment and family which, with all that means in present influence and the transmission of past history, really settles most things for us. It settles a great deal of what we are and what we can do. Whatever be the place and power of personal choice, we are conditioned and limited by much over which we have no influence. Even in the big things we know in how true a sense

it is we do not choose but are chosen. Theoretically we have an unlimited power of choice as to the kind of work we will do in the world and the kind of friendships we will form, but practically much is out of our reach. It is true that in the deepest sense we need never be the mere victims of our fate, but may be its masters. It is true that in the deepest sense the thing that matters in our work is the spirit in which we do it, the quality of the workman and not the kind of work he does. And in our friendships what really matters is the kind of friend we are and the kind of relation it is made, not the particular persons or the particular grade of society they belong to. Still the great broad element of necessity remains a fact in both of these very important spheres. It may be better, as the proverb says, for a man to rule himself than to rule a city, but often the man who could rule the city or the nation has no opportunity and is tied to other work. In the great things of life we seem often to be passive recipients rather than active agents. Emerson said: "My friends have come to me unsought; the great God gave them to me." As in the crises of life this element of necessity must be recognised.

It seems even to go deeper than in the matter of opportunity afforded, deep into the fundamental facts

of personality to which we give names like that of heredity and temperament and predisposition. Hazlitt in the *Plain Speaker* has an essay on Personal Character which he prefaces with a sentence from Montaigne: "Men palliate and conceal their original qualities, but do not extirpate them." The thesis of the essay is that no man really changes his character. He may alter for better or worse, may improve opportunity and mend his manners, as we say, but the character, the internal original bias remains always the same. It is a variant of the old prophetic question: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" This may be stated too absolutely, leading to despair or callousness, that what a man is he must be, like the grain in the wood. The tree may be warped or bent or its growth encouraged, but the grain is the same. It seems to leave us in as hopeless a fix as the old-world doctrine of planetary influence and our fate as lying in our stars. But it really means, what we see to be a fact, that temperamental characteristics remain. It does not mean that they cannot be altered or in any way changed, but that they persist through all change. The melancholy type does not become the mercurial. The man of sanguine temper is never as the phlegmatic, and never can quite be. Natural aptitudes

remain. Progress means that it should be progress along that fixed line, that a man should become the best of his kind. The fact is stated foolishly and wickedly if it is stated as destroying effort and shutting out moral hope. It should rather be an inducement to effort and progress. Peter, it is true, could never be like John, and James could never be a Nathaniel, and Thomas who doubted could never be Judas who betrayed. But Peter from being the boastful braggart could become the resolute champion of the Cross, and Judas need not have succumbed to his covetousness and sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver. Though personal character may be fixed as Hazlitt maintained, we can counteract tendencies and strengthen infirmities and be cured of the defects of our qualities. To hold otherwise is to deny conversion, deny the grace of God even when seeming to uphold something like His sovereignty.

In fact the doctrine which underlies our Lord's words is really the doctrine of grace, and the consciousness of this is a matter of experience. Every disciple of Christ knew himself to be chosen and called; and we know it still. "After that we have known God, or rather have been known of God," St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, correcting his first statement into one in accord with experience. The

beginning of everything is God's love and grace. If we love Him it is because He first loved us. "Herein is love," said St. John, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us." It is not that we choose, but that we are chosen. Christian faith is simply the acceptance of Christ's love, a love which is there, not dependent on our love or anything in us. Faith is to recognise this existing love.

A right acceptance of this great truth means strength and comfort and peace. Our salvation depends on something more stable than ourselves. The words which Christ used there to His disciples are meant for their consolation, part of the comfort He gives them for His absence. He is to leave them and they are to be sent out to a world which hates them, and it is for comfort that they should know that they are not picked out haphazardly but chosen by Himself for a great purpose.

Also Christ's choice is for service, not to privilege but to duty. From one aspect it is the selection of an instrument. Of course it is more than that, because a man is not like a dead tool that may be honoured by being used for a high purpose. He is conscious of his destiny and makes himself the willing agent of love. There is privilege in it. Who can be blind to the privilege and blessing of the

twelve with their days and nights spent in the company of Jesus, touching His hand and looking into His eyes and hearing His words and communing with His soul? And there is privilege in every high choice. But the sense of privilege and personal blessing are by the way, something that comes along with the chief end. The happiness is a sort of by-product, always produced, but not for its own sake. The real purpose lies in the ultimate service designed: "I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." It is election to fruitfulness, to being and doing, not to enjoying. The enjoying is not missed, but it comes as a result of the larger end.

When we speak of the blessings of Christ's choice of men, do we always think of the *purpose?* Every man who does any work in the world uses consciously or unconsciously the same principle; he chooses his instruments and elects his means. The artist chooses to use certain pigments and colours. The master chooses to use certain men for certain work. The workman chooses to use certain tools. But all these are subservient to the great end and aim beyond. God's work in the world cannot be done otherwise. He chooses His instruments, but how we destroy the meaning of words and cloak the sense! The dis-

taste which men have so often taken to what is called the doctrine of election, is largely due to an error here, to a false conception of its purpose. We think of it exclusively as privilege; the Bible thinks of it mainly as service. As in all selection, there is always an eye to the future and to the larger whole. This is Nature's way in all vital development of which we have traces. And religiously we see it to be God's way throughout the whole record of the Bible. Abraham was chosen, for Abraham's sake yes, because he was the fit instrument, but chosen really for the world's sake. And so on through the long list of chosen men. Even the chosen nation is blessed, that through her all the nations of the earth may be blessed. It is against the whole teaching of the Bible that there is ever in God's dealings favouritism in our meaning of that word. So little is this the case, that with the prophets God's choice of them is sometimes a burden from which they would fain draw back, not a privilege but a penalty, a passion, often a tragedy. And their teaching also is along this line. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, *therefore* I will punish you for all your iniquities." What a glaring *non-sequitur* this appears to us, as it did to the Jews themselves. With irreligious men the thought of divine choice

loses spiritual force and is made an occasion for narrow exclusiveness and empty pride.

A gift carries its price. A divine right means some divine duties. The disciple is indeed chosen,—blessed privilege,—but he is chosen that he should go and bring forth fruit. St. Peter, writing to the Church, calls Christians elect, but his word is "elect unto obedience." St. Paul calls upon the Ephesians to bless God who hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. If we feel ourselves within the scope of God's purpose and believe ourselves within the circle of the Saviour's love, let us humbly bless Him and rejoice in His gracious favour, but let us see that His purpose is being forwarded, that we are making ourselves channels of His grace. Christians are not called to be saved primarily, but called to be saints. They are not called to a crown of life, but called to be faithful unto death and then to obtain a crown of life. Disciples are chosen that they should go and bring forth fruit.

If Christ chooses men does it seem useless to speak about men choosing Christ? By no means. We have seen that there is a sense in which the disciples chose Christ. We are chosen for the same reason for

which we would choose. To try to separate the two processes is to make a futile distinction, like too fine distinctions between choosing a friend and being chosen by him. There is a calling of God to which the soul of man responds, but religion means that the human soul *does* respond. Faith means the acceptance of a love which is offered us. It does not create the love, but it recognises it and receives it. If we know that Christ has chosen us it is because we have chosen Him. If we are sure to the marrow of our bones that God loves us, it is because we have begun to respond to that love. And the door is open. If there is no favouritism there is also no exclusion. We choose Him who first chose us. We love Him who first loved us. Here at the Table, as we take the pledge of discipleship, we choose the Master who has chosen us. His we are, and Him we serve. We accept the strength and comfort and peace that come from the knowledge that our choice is His choice and that He holds us by a love that will not let us go. We remind ourselves, also, that we are His for service, that we should go and bring forth fruit.

## XXVI

## LOVE'S SELF-EXPRESSION

*Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God and goeth unto God . . . began to wash the disciples' feet.*—St. John xiii. 3.

The general preface which the Apostle gives to this scene is "having loved His own which were in the world, Jesus loved them to the end." As all His life revealed love so was the end of His life. It was only the carrying of it a stage further. The glass ran itself out in golden sands. The life passed in music out of sight. The last was as the first and the perfect round was completed. Having loved, He loved unto the end.

In illustration, then, of that love in the hours at the end, this beautiful scene is recalled of how the Master washed the disciples' feet. It is given as a last proof of that wonderful love. It was meant to teach some needful lessons, but primarily it was a spontaneous outburst, the yearning of His heart at the thought of the approaching separation. The

Apostle sees more in it than any practical purpose of pointing a moral. It arose out of an inherent necessity of Christ's own nature, a need for self-expression. St. John traces it back to the very Godhead itself. "Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He came from God and goeth unto God, Jesus riseth from supper and layeth aside His garments and He took a towel and girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." How lovingly every movement is recalled! He sees Him do it again, as he loved to see Him do it all over again and again in fond memory during these long years. He brings back every gesture, every step in that wondrous self-abasement. And the fruit of a long life of meditation on the sweet life he was privileged to behold is seen in the reason he gives for this act of love.

Why did Jesus do it? Not merely that it might be an object lesson to disciples whose minds were full of ambitions and jealousies. For that reason also; but He did it, says the Apostle, as part of His inevitable self-expression. "Because He knew that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He came from God and goeth unto God." That is

the divine philosophy of the act. The consciousness of His divine mission and the knowledge of His future glory, so far from being restraints in keeping Him from this demeaning act, were the spur that made Him so act. It was from the pinnacle of divine glory that He stooped to a deed of self-effacement. The Apostle lays emphasis on this. It was not that Christ forgot Himself for a moment, forgot His dignity. It was not that He was not quite sure of His relation to the Father. If ever He knew it, it was then. It was, according to St. John, in His moment of highest self-knowledge that He, because of that knowledge, performed this servile office. Christ had full knowledge of His glory and dignity and in spite of that—nay, *because of that*—He emptied Himself of His glory and took upon Himself the form of a servant. The nearer the end, the more Christ was conscious of His glory, and the more clearly did He show that it was the glory of perfect sacrifice.

What is the meaning of this to us? It means that here in this self-humiliation we have a revelation of what God is. It means that here we have a sample of the divine life, and therefore a standard for all human life. To make a mistake about God is to vitiate all possible doctrines about man. It means that love is the test of life, and that unselfish service

is the test of love. Not to understand this is not to understand the nature of love. The earth breeds many false forms of love, born of passion, selfish in origin and end. But true love serves, seeketh not even her own, stoops to conquer, is ready to win her crown by self-forgetfulness. As we look at this beautiful act in the upper chamber—the act itself a sacrament—let us keep firm hold of this thought that the very heart of God is laid bare in it, that love like this is the natural manifestation of the divine. If we do not see that such condescension is the natural and necessary act of One who "came forth from God and goeth unto God," then let us pray for clearer eyes and purer hearts that we may be able to recognise divinity when it appears with such effulgent spiritual glory.

There was also necessity for a lesson like this for the disciples at the time. We know from another Gospel that just before there had occurred one of their unseemly quarrels about precedence. St. Luke tells us "there was also a strife among them which of them should be accounted the greatest." They all seemed to be aware that a crisis was approaching. In spite of Christ's teaching, however, their notions about the kingdom were materialistic. The true glory of Christ's work was not understood by them.

To make a triumphal entry into the great city amid the plaudits of men, to wield the sceptre of David, and to judge the twelve tribes of Israel, these would have been marks of divine favour. They were ready to scramble after dignities, place and power in the new kingdom, after the usual fashion of men. So, at the first communion table there were marks of subdued strife and the clashing of poor ambitions. Probably Christ noticed a reluctance on the part of any one to lower his pretensions by serving the others. He rose from the table and performed the menial act of washing their feet, by the very act revealing of what sort His kingdom was.

Now from this stupendous revelation of the inner nature of divine self-expression some very essential things regarding human life follow. Religion is the life of God, and if Christ in this object-lesson declares the nature of the heavenly Father, then we have presented to us a very practical test of our religion. How far are we ruled by love? How far has the spirit of Jesus influenced our thoughts and acts? How far have we given up our efforts after self-satisfaction through self-indulgence? How far have we resigned our own will and are ready to serve? Know ye the meaning of this parable in action? "Know ye what I have done unto you?"

asked Christ, giving a plain application of the sacramental sermon, nay, even laying bare the very heart of the Holy Communion itself, "if I the Lord and the Master have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet."

What a rebuke this is to the thoughts of our hearts and to the state of the world. What a rebuke to our innumerable divisions and boundaries which we set up to keep men from recognising their brethren. What a rebuke to our classes and castes and distinctions. What a rebuke to our evil minds inflamed by envies and jealousies and ambitions. Our civilisation presents too much the spectacle of a mad scramble of every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Perhaps in this, too, it may be the first that shall be last, the foremost the hindmost, the devil's lawful prey. We are glad to confess that the spirit of the Lord Jesus is in our midst. How much of sweet service and humble love there is we cannot rightly measure, and He will own it all. But also the general misapprehension as to the true riches of life, the delirious search for that which profiteth not, the insane craving for distinctions and possessions which do not in themselves make men rich towards God! Do we believe that only in the measure in which we imitate Jesus in this respect, in that

measure we have truly lived? Is our chief end of life to get or to give? Life is judged by love; love is measured by service. There can be no other test from the nature of God Himself.

The devil of self-seeking in his multitude of forms is not easily dethroned from the human heart. In the very chamber of the king of souls that night when He stooped to reveal His nature, there was a man who was seeking self and turned his back upon the love of God and the love of his brethren. The feet of Judas also that night were touched with the sacramental rite of washing, but *not* the heart. The Master's gentle hand washed his feet and wiped them with the towel. Did not the water sting him? Did not Christ's touch madden him with contrast to his dark traitor's heart? We can be in Christ's presence and yet be far from Him. We can be false to Him in other ways than selling Him for silver. There are many forms of the temptation to divorce religion from the life of service and yet to think we still possess love. There is a luxurious religiousness which lives in mystic meditations, which takes delight in beautiful thoughts about the Cross and fine phrases about self-denial, but never once lifts a little finger to touch the world's burden. It knows nothing of service. It knows nothing of washing the feet

of Christ's brethren. It is cradled in selfishness. The blight of Judas is on it. It betrays the Master with a kiss. "Ye call Me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet." God stoops because it is God-like. Man must stoop if he would rise to the stature of Christ. The service of love and of love's Lord is open to us all. We never lack opportunities to discipline self and seek the highest good of others. We never lack opportunities to comfort and strengthen and bless.

Two great conclusions follow from the profound thought of our text. A simple word or look or deed of lovingkindness may make a rift in the cloud that darkens life for some soul and let him see into heaven. Whoso shows to a human heart love shows that heart God.

The second is like unto it. To wash the feet of the brethren is to wash the feet of Christ, to take the sting out of His wounds where the nails pierced Him. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

## XXVII

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAITH

*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.* —Romans xv. 13.

St. Paul finishes the practical exhortations of his Epistle with this gracious benediction, invoking on their behalf a rich blessing, that their faith may be crowned with joy and peace and hope. He has been dealing with some of the problems which arise in the Christian society, how the Jew and the Gentile are to live together and each get the fullest good from their common faith; how the scrupulous conscience and the more robust nature must exercise mutual toleration, and must help each other, and if need be sacrifice something for each other. To all, and in all difficulties, love will find a way, and will prove the fulfilling of the law. If love have free course, it will justify itself by its noble fruits of patience and service. The strong will help the weak: the weak will rise to strength through growth in grace and in

knowledge. To the believing Jew the Gospel will come as truth, confirming the promises made unto the fathers. To the believing Gentile, it will come as mercy. And both with one mind and one mouth will glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Over both, over all, he utters the same benediction, suggesting to all by the very terms of the blessing that the true solution of all their difficulties is to make their faith richer and stronger and fuller, joyful, peaceful, hopeful. Faith so buoyant and vital will make little of their problems. It is when the vitality of faith is lowered, when it ceases to take hold of life by the strong right arm, that these small difficulties loom large. This is the conclusion of all these controversies and the solution of them, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

The keynote of the benediction is struck in the first words, "The God of hope." God is still to us the God of hope: all we are or can be is bound up in Him. Without Him, life would be a dreary desert without meaning or rational end. But the very phrase cannot thrill us with its suggestiveness, as it must have done the early Christians. With our keenest imagination, we cannot fully appreciate the

new and wonderful hope which the Christian faith brought to the hard pagan world. Even intellectually, to say nothing of morally and spiritually, it was as the beginning of all things. From the confused ideas of Gods many and Lords many, without character, without consistency, from the maddening despair of polytheism to men whose minds were being enlightened and whose consciences were being awakened; to the conception of the One-God, and that God the Heavenly Father revealed in Christ; the transition must have been so great, bringing such a flood of light and meaning to the world and life; it must have made such a difference that this God they now believed in could be called pre-eminently the God of hope.

The power of the thought is still further enhanced when we think of those who made the majority of the early Church. Many who were victims of the stern rule of Rome, the broken remnants of many races, the oppressed, the down-trodden, slaves, freedmen who had known the bitterness of slavery, men who had no longer a country, no longer a true home, no longer even a religion; some of a higher rank upon whom had come deep weariness and despair of truth, who were without God and therefore without hope in the world; all these were there, and others of the class

to whom the Master appealed when He called all that labour and are heavy-laden to come to Him. Can we imagine, in even a dim and distant fashion, the new hope, the new fountain of joy, the new way of peace, opened to all such by the faith of Christ? Well might St. Paul invoke on them the blessing of the God of hope. And to all, the very terms of the blessing meant a trumpet-call to realise the glorious contents of their faith, to live in full and conscious possession of their inheritance.

Do we not need the same reminder of the consequences of our faith, of what it should bring to our life of joy and peace and hope? Do we enter into our Christian inheritance? Do we not usually live far below our opportunities and our privileges? Our heritage is more spacious and sublime than we admit even to ourselves. Our faith being what it is, the spirit of our lives ought to be different. We should not live so much under the cloud, in a depressed state, with lowered spiritual vitality. We should know more of the glad confidence of morning, more of the exultant, victorious ease of living. May not this be the explanation of our painful lack of power? No man can do his best work in a depressed state: and no man can do his best living in a depressed state. Can faith be having its free course

in our nature if it has not changed the tone and spirit of our life? We believe: but do we push out to the conclusions which should follow from the believing? Do we let it fructify into joy and peace and hope? St. Paul constantly speaks of these as the inevitable result of faith. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God . . . and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." It is the same triad of graces as in this benediction, "Peace and joy in believing, that ye may have hope." These are the inner contents of the faith, the expected outcome. To have the believing without the peace and joy and hope, is to have the root and plant without the blossom and the fruit. It is almost to make the love of God of none effect. Believing in the forgiveness of sin, and in reconciliation with God, accepting His eternal love in Christ, and all that such a revelation means, one of the results of the faith should be the reflex action on ourselves.

Our belief in God's character and nature, and in His purpose of love in Jesus Christ, should bring great and abiding joy. It does not mean that we should omit out of our consideration the sterner, sadder elements of life, the permanence of the moral law with its dread sanctions, God's hatred of sin, our own failure to attain. It does not mean that we

should cultivate a shallow light-heartedness of disposition which reaches a complacent view of the world by the elimination of all uncomfortable facts. The most fatuous and nauseous of all false creeds is that which looks on God as a sort of superior philanthropist, with a weak good-will, a colourless benevolence, without passion, without justice, without even principle. As if there were no law with its inflexible conditions; as if goodness could exist without righteousness, and love without justice; as if sin were nothing but an amiable mistake, amiably overlooked by a complacent deity; as if the world were a universal rose-coloured blur, without clear light and dark shadow!

All the same we often needlessly and wilfully darken life, and obscure the light of God's love, and hinder it from its perfect work in us. We do not accept the consequences of our faith: we do not joyfully receive the glad tidings of great joy: the early rapture dies out: we no longer feel the thrill of the revelation,

> As when a great thought strikes along the brain
> And flushes all the cheek.

In our ordinary mood the last word we would use to express God to us is "the God of hope." Believing

does not carry in its bosom all joy and peace, and we cannot be said to abound in hope. We seem to have lost the exultant sense of mastery over life and victory over the world, so notable in the early Church. A common type of devotion, of which our devotional books are full, is of a settled melancholy, with a beauty of a kind, the beauty of autumn, not the exhilaration of spring with its rich exuberance of life. We live under a leaden sky. Our faith is too often an uneasy introspection. It does not flower out in the sunshine of God's love, radiant with the joy of possessing that love. We do not enter fully into our Kingdom of love; and so the passion, and mystery, and wonder, and adoring ecstasy of it have not entered into us. Where are the evidences of peace and joy and hope in believing? We need a sweeter, sunnier faith.

For one thing, there is no way of commending the Gospel but this. It was this, the living Epistles of men's lives, the flush and fervour of the joyous faith, the abounding hope, which won for Christ His first great triumphs in the early centuries. The rich beauty of holiness, the winsome attractive graces, were ambassadors for God more powerful and eloquent than preacher's voice or Apostle's pen. Spiritual conviction does not come by argument. Logic

is not the key which unlocks the Kingdom. Life more abundant, undying hope, fragrant peace, the strange unearthly joy, these were the missionaries of the cross. Augustine might wander away in his youth, seduced by the world's pleasure, enticed by rhetorician's art, allured by ambition; but the memory of his mother's sweet faith and patient love never let him go; and every time he met a man like Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and noted the same Christian marks, he was drawn back from his devious paths to consider again the claims of Christ. It was so from the beginning. St. Paul and his fellow-workers approved themselves to the Corinthians, as he could truthfully say, "by pureness, by longsuffering, by kindness, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." We must get back the early tone and temper, if we would have the early triumphs. We must live in the power of the Holy Ghost, if we would regain the early gladness and hope and singleness of heart.

Why not? Who should be happy and joyful, if not we? Who should know peace of mind, and live sweetly and simple, if not we? Who should be saved by eternal hope, and abound in it, if not we, to whom has come the vision, and the revelation of the ador-

able Saviour, full of grace and truth? There is a joy in Christ larger and grander than any earthly joy. There is a peace in Christ which touches depths unknown to the world. There is a blessedness of soul in Christ, of which we cannot find words to speak to others and can only whisper to our own happy hearts. There is a hope in Him which goes on past life, and death, and the last memory of the earth. "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope."

We say that at the worst we can always hope, and all can hope—but can we? Hope to be true hope, and not mere idle wishing, must have a foundation. Otherwise it is only hoping against hope, which means hoping in the absence of all the conditions that would justify hope, empty, delusive dreaming that some good may turn up. Such hope may be a pleasant companion, but is a treacherous guide, and will in all probability land a man in the ditch. The Christian hope is built on knowledge. Its head is in the clouds, but its feet are in present and actual joy and peace. The present is its security and its guarantee. "The miserable have no other medicine, but only hope," says Shakespeare, but such hope may be merely the longing that a better time may come, and is not the glad confidence of the man who knows

the comfort and strength of love now. Christian hope is grounded on Christian experience. The man who knows the joy and peace of believing may well have hope. He has good reason for it. Our present is our future in the making. If we have no faith now, what reason have we for expecting the fruits of faith in some later time? The hope here described is the expectation that faith will bear the same great fruits of joy and peace hereafter as well as here.

Christ is the promise and pledge of this. Christ is the centre of the Christian faith. Christ is the joy and peace of the Christian heart—and He is our hope. All that we need assert, and believe, of the future is that He will be the same for ever as He was yesterday, and is to-day. He who was the beginning will be the end. He who was the Author of our faith will be the Finisher. He will be the environment of the Christian soul, what matters where, or when, or how? In Paul's great language, the riches of the glory of the mystery, is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

"Finally therefore, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Let us enter into our heritage of peace and joy. The great days of the faith will return when we let faith so pervade our being that the graces of the spirit will blossom naturally. Such exultant

faith will triumph easily over sin, over sorrow, over death. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. We must not be ever driven like a hunted deer. In the love of God we will surely emerge into peace sometime. Let the joy of the Lord be our strength. Let us live in Christ, sustained by His strength, inspired by His love, overshadowed by His peace. In Him our joy will not be a *mood* merely, fickle, fleeting, but a *state,* the normal condition of life.

> The night
> Wanes into morning, and the dawning light
> Broadens, and all the shadows fade and shift!
> I follow, follow—sure to meet the sun,
> And confident that what the future yields
> Will be the right—unless myself be wrong.

The God of hope fill you with all peace and joy in believing, that ye may abound in hope; for underneath are the everlasting arms.

## XXVIII

## THE PEOPLE OF THE COVENANT

*The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb.*—
DEUTERONOMY v. 2.

THE idea of covenant runs through the Bible. It was a very natural figure to use to express the relationship between God and His people. Men's minds were accustomed to the ideas involved in a covenant, as it is one of the commonest experiences of social life. Indeed there can be no social life without it. The very fact of living together implies contracts, agreements undertaken by two or more parties, though we may not accept Rousseau's famous interpretation of it in his doctrine of the "Social Contract." But in any case men even in the most primitive conditions understood a covenant to be a mutual compact of some kind; it might be a treaty in which the whole community was involved, when the tribe or nation entered into a league with another; it might be a covenant of friendship as that between Jonathan and David, "Jonathan and David made a

covenant because he loved him as his own soul"; it might be for trade or some mutual advantage among equals, if only the advantage of refraining from hurting each other, as the compact between Abimelech king of the Philistines and Isaac, "Let us," said Abimelech, "make a covenant with thee, that thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee and have done thee nothing but good." The compact need not be between equals but might apply to the mercy extended by a conqueror to a vanquished foe, as when Ahab after his great victory over the Syrians made a covenant with the king Ben-hadad to let him live. With a word of such wide and elastic meaning, we can see how appropriate it was to represent the relationship in which Israel believed herself to stand towards God. Indeed all religions are more or less in the form of a covenant, perhaps not definitely expressed, and certainly not so clearly expressed as in the Jewish religion; but every worshipper in every religion came with his worship, his prayers, his offerings, with the tacit understanding that his deity had a special interest in him, or could be made by fit means to take that interest.

In the Old Testament the idea of covenant colours the whole history. Pious Jews looking back interpreted not only the particular history of their race,

but even universal history by the thought of covenant. Creation itself was a covenant, and the sign of the covenant was the Sabbath. After the flood the escape of Noah and all the living creatures with him is represented as the establishing of a covenant, and the token of it is the bow in the clouds, as a remembrance of the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. The history of their own race begins with a covenant with Abram, which on the side of God takes the form of a promise, and one which includes all Abram's posterity, the whole people of Israel. "In that day Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land." Other instances there are of a covenant between God and a single man, such as that with David; but in all these cases there is a national and a religious purpose in them. It is on behalf of the people they are entered into. The promise to David, as also the promise to Abraham, was a promise for the benefit of the nation; and in each case there was a moral condition attached to it. A contract by the very nature of the case was not a one-sided thing. It was a compact by virtue of which God offered His favour under certain conditions. It was a promise on the side of God: it was an agreement to fulfil the conditions on the side of

men. And these conditions, especially as illustrated by the prophets, were in their essence of a moral nature.

So the most typical of all the covenants, the one which became the very centre of the religious life of Israel, was this one at Sinai when God entered into relationship with the whole people as a people. It is not necessary further to trace the history of the covenant doctrine in the prophets, in the books of the law, in the priests' code. Every one with any biblical knowledge will admit how this idea of covenant relationship fills and colours the whole history of Israel. In the cases we have chosen we have already seen all the essential features of the thought.

These are *first,* that God of His grace condescends to enter into this relationship. The common artificial distinction so often drawn between what is called the covenant of works of the Old Testament, and the covenant of grace of the New Testament, has no support from the Bible. That is a purely imaginary distinction. Every divine covenant is of grace, the lovingkindness of a Father who taught Ephraim to walk, holding him by the arms. The grateful nation looked back adoringly and said, "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb."

The *second* point is that the two parties to a

covenant are free moral agents. If it is of the free grace of God, it is also of the free will of man. As religion became less national and more individual this became clearer and clearer to spiritually-minded men like the prophets, and carried with it the implication that salvation had to be freely accepted by men.

The *third* feature follows from that. Since a covenant need not be between equals, and may be (as must be when God is one of the parties to it) all giving on the one side, and all taking on the other, and yet nevertheless implies mutual freedom, it also therefore implies obligation on both sides. Each party to the bargain has rights. Men who enter into a contract with each other can claim to be treated according to the bond; each possesses legal rights, or at at least moral rights. The covenant people knew that they would receive from God not only favour but justice, that God would treat them according to law and not according to caprice; and what an immense advance in the moral education of man that knowledge meant! On the other side God expected from the covenant people the fulfilment of the moral obligations they took upon themselves. This was the covenant made in Horeb. On the one side, "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of Egypt from the house of bondage." It was the God

who was the Providence of their race, who had graciously chosen Israel, and led her, and guarded her, and taught her His law. He was their Saviour in the past, their King in the present, their hope for the future.

On the other side of the bargain were the conditions on which they received the divine favours. These conditions are stated in the Ten Commandments, the words of the covenant. "I am the Lord thy God," that on the one side—on the other, "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." The people are to be separated, dedicated, consecrated. The chosen people are to be a holy people. Their lives are to belong to God, His property. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb; and then follow the terms of the contract, the Decalogue, which remains to this day the highest summary of the moral law, man's duty to God and to his fellowmen. It is this ethical aspect of the covenant relationship which saved it from the arrogance and national pride and empty presuming on favour, which otherwise would soon have killed religion. Israel's privilege (the spiritual teachers never ceased to remind them) was Israel's penalty. Every right, every favour, meant a duty. Thus we see that the history of revelation, the history of religion is the history of God's cove-

nant with men, and so the revelation of God in Christ could only be fitly described as the new covenant. That, too, like the covenants of the past, since it meant new light, new spiritual opportunity, meant also added moral obligation.

"The Lord our God made a covenant with us"—that is not only the heart of the Decalogue; but it is also the very heart of religion. Religion begins with the consciousness that we are brought into relationship with God, and stand to Him in terms of love and grace. So the idea of covenant is woven into the complete fabric of the Bible. The Bible is the record of divine covenant. This great figure has been too often stated merely forensically, as a legal contract. Because of this it has repelled men. But it is an eternal truth nevertheless; and you must in some way restate it spiritually to yourself, before religion has its birth in you. The prophets spoke of the covenant not as a formal act, like a legal document, drawn up on a special occasion. To them it was a figure of speech by which they expressed their interpretation of the spiritual history of man, the explanation of the spiritual position of Israel. How else are you going to explain that wonderful history of grace? What other word will better express the essential fact, namely that God did enter into human

history, and men were brought near to God and walked with Him in humility and truth? But whether you use the word or not, the religious life is a phantom unless there be a reality behind this idea of covenant. Fellowship with God implies the consciousness of a relationship of love and favour between God and man. Call it covenant, call it Fatherhood and sonship, call it the marriage of Christ and His Church (and these are all biblical images), they are but names, earthly figures to express the spiritual reality of fellowship.

What did this covenant-relationship do for Israel? Without it there would have been no Israel. The assurance of a covenant with God brought strength to the national life. To stand in covenant-relationship to Jehovah, so that they felt that they were the people of God, chosen by Him, meant a rich vital force, bringing out into fullness all their powers politically and religiously. "The people that know their God shall be strong and do exploits." This assurance made them a nation, welded them into one, and carried them victoriously over difficulties. In the field of battle it nerved the arm and stayed the heart. Their leaders were only instruments in the hand of their God to work out His loving purpose to them. Gideon or any other might be that instru-

ment; but it was "the sword of the Lord." Every event was God-appointed, and so was meant for education. Even in defeat and humiliation the consciousness of a national vocation kept them from despair. In the dread furnace of the Exile, when denationalised, torn from country, scattered among heathen, their faith saved them, and the nation never died.

The very real temptation which this sense of divine favour engendered was the temptation to *presumption*. It overtook the Jews more than once in their later history. But that was the defect of the quality, or rather the natural temptation of the privilege. This state of presumption was common at the time of our Lord, empty pride of spiritual privilege, because the Lord had made a covenant with them at Horeb; and against this much of our Lord's teaching was directed. But He did not deny the fact on which the presumption fed itself: He attacked the vain deduction which was drawn from the fact. Life of any sort, to be truly judged, must be seen not in its forms of disease but in its forms of health. The whole history of the little nation of Israel is a striking proof of the power of the idea of divine covenant.

Of the reality of fellowship with God every religious man is assured. Religion implies just such

a relationship of love and grace on the part of God. How such a consciousness brings strength and comfort to a human heart, let every one who knows the power of salvation attest! Even in debased and vicious forms it can be seen to be powerful, making a man strong in a blatant land. It is seen in its debased form in such a man as Napoleon, with his faith in his own star, feeling himself to be the man of destiny. The faith such as it was carried him far. Every man of strong character has this faith in some form or other, that he is separated out somehow to do something or be something. When the faith is truly *religious*, and not superstition, it drives a life with resistless energy in lines that, unlike Napoleon's, bless the world. It gave the Church in her days of persecution power to suffer and to wait. It was the comfort of the Church of the first centuries: it was the strength of the Scottish Covenanters—not the written document "Solemn League and Covenant," but the inward assurance that they were serving God, and spilling their blood worthily, and standing in the will of their Heavenly Father. Is there any motive in the whole bundle of life calculated to inspire to noble action like this one that the Lord our God made a covenant with us?

Is there anything so dreary as the life which has

no outlook, no thrill of spiritual power, no vision of the beauty and grace and love of the Eternal, no hope even of a Saviour, a Master of men to flash on us and make our hearts dance to His resounding tread? If you dislike the word covenant, and think it too legal, too commercial a figure to express such a great reality, leave the word: what about the great fact, or great faith, for which the word only feebly stands? What about this fellowship of God which men of all ages have experienced and felt so sweet? Is it that men in simpler days once believed, and were happy in believing, that earth was so near to heaven, that human life was fraught with such eternal significance, that the Lord their God entered into human history and made a covenant with them? Is the heaven now brass above us, and the earth a sodden mass, and life a poor and pitiful gift? Must we look back wistfully but hopelessly to the time when men could stay their heart-hunger by the thought that God remembered men and visited them? Is there no lot possible for us except that of aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world?

Nay, the presence of Christ in our sinful world is an eternal protest against such a hopeless creed.

Who can see the beauty of His holiness, who can see Him full of grace and truth, and behold His glory, without feeling that He is well called Immanuel, God with us and God for us? He is the way of access, the Mediator of the new covenant; and the sign of the covenant is blood; the very blood of His love. Lift up your face, even with stain of tears, and believe. Lift up your heart and accept the pledge of the Father's love. And let the inspiring power of the faith fill your life, that the Lord your God has made an everlasting covenant with you.

# XXIX

## THE TERMS OF THE COVENANT

*I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before Me.*—DEUTERONOMY v. 6, 7.

IN the figure of covenant, which colours the whole Bible language of the relationship between God and man, there are three elements common to the idea. The first essential feature of the thought is that God of His free grace enters into this covenant relationship; and the second is that the two parties to a compact are free moral agents, that it is of the free will of man as well as of the free grace of God. The third feature which follows from that is that there is implied obligation on both sides. It is the last of these that specially concerns us in our text. In this covenant at Horeb, which is the typical covenant of the Old Testament, the covenant to which all the prophets appealed in their warnings and pleadings and threatenings, we have the two sides, the two contracting parties, the obligations which rest

upon both God and His people—the terms of the covenant. On God's side it is a *promise* for the future, based on the very nature of God, and based on the past history of grace, the blessed experience they have already known. On the side of Israel it is a *pledge* to be truly His people. It is a compact of grace and mercy on God's part, of privilege and duty on theirs. The two sides of the covenant are given briefly in our text.

I. *The divine side of covenant.* The terms of the compact are these: On God's side He promises to be to them the same gracious loving Providence which they and their fathers have known, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." This is more than the statement of a fact, more than a succinct résumé of history. It is a statement of what God engages Himself to be and to do. The 43d question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is, "What is the Preface to the Ten Commandments?" and the corresponding answer is, "The Preface to the Ten Commandments is in these words: I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The compilers of the Catechism have neglected the figure of a covenant which is always associated in the Bible with the

Decalogue. This verse is more than a preface, a foreword to what follows, more than a few words of introduction to the more important message that is to come. So it is more than the simple statement of a historical fact. It is more than a preface: it is the one side of the terms of the covenant which God made with Israel in Horeb. By missing this idea of the passage the Catechism misses the great motive introduced to keep faith on the other side. On God's side it is an appeal to history, but not only an appeal to what He has done, but also what He has shown Himself to be. The very name Jehovah (I am Jehovah) means that He will be what He has been, the "I Am," the Eternal, without variableness or shadow of turning; the "To Be" as well as the "I Am."

It is a promise based first of all on His very nature, on what He has revealed Himself to be. Then the reference to the historical fact, the reference to the deliverance from Egypt, adds richness to the promise, suggesting the practical help of their God, God the Saviour, who has in times past revealed Himself to Israel as such. He declares Himself as their Redeemer, the loving God who was the Providence of their race, who had chosen Israel and led her and guarded her, condescending to them, re-

vealing Himself to them, the God who took Ephraim by the hand and taught him to walk. The other side of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, takes its force from this, making its exclusive and almost stern appeal to fulfil the conditions implied in the covenant. The covenant briefly is "I will be their God and they shall be My people," but the kind of people they are expected to become depends on the kind of God He has shown Himself to be. Religion is absolutely determined by the character of the God worshipped.

The lives of the worshippers sooner or later conform to the character of their deity. No greater demand can be made upon the worshippers than is implicitly contained in the conception of the character of their God. The pious Jew of each succeeding generation could for himself fill up with illustrations from their history the meaning of God's side of the covenant, "I am Jehovah thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." And all the demands of their law issued from that proposition that Jehovah was the one only God, and the one only source of salvation.

II. *The human side of covenant.* We see at once how the first Commandment exactly balances that,

"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." That is the terms of the covenant on the human side. From that all the other commandments flow, of worship of God and of duty to men. All the religion of Israel, growing more spiritual through the messages of the prophets and the lives of the saints, was but the development of the fundamental revelation of the covenant at Horeb. "I am Jehovah thy God" —"Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me"; these are the terms of the everlasting covenant which God makes with all His people. The divine promise is balanced by human obligation. This obligation is set forth in the Ten Commandments. But they are not arbitrary conditions imposed as tests of faith; they follow essentially from the revelation of the character of God made to them. Because Jehovah is their covenant God, giving Himself to them, they are required to reverence Him and think of Him in accordance with His true nature; and their conduct must be worthy of Him. Because Jehovah is their God, being such an one as He has shown Himself to be, they, if they are to be His people, must fulfil the necessary conditions of the covenant: must have no other gods, must not worship graven images like the heathen, must not take the name of Jehovah in vain, must keep holy His Sabbath day;

and in their conduct to men, to parents and neighbours, must live as the people of the righteous God.

All the commandments flow from the first item of the human side of the covenant, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." A large part of Deuteronomy indeed is an expansion of the first commandment, inculcating duty to God, asking for loyal trust and zealous service. God promises to be their God, their Redeemer; and they pledge themselves to give Him undivided worship, and loyalty, and obedience to His moral commands. The first duty of Israel, who has been so privileged, is to love Jehovah, to be true to Him in spite of the blandishments of false religions, to remember Him in the midst of the success and prosperity He will give them, to keep His commandments and to teach them to their children. They are to be a holy people, consecrate to God. For all God's gracious providence with them, for all the wonderful history of His mercy and loving-kindness in the past, for all the favour they are daily receiving, all that is asked of them is loving and loyal obedience. The Lord set His love on them and chose them, not because they were more in number than any people, for they were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved them. He is the faithful God who keepeth covenant, and they

therefore also must keep covenant, fulfil the conditions of the covenant, that is keep the commandments of God.

Thus the Decalogue, which expresses the fundamental relationship between God and man, is grounded on a *moral* basis. Man's side of the covenant was performed not by scrupulous attention to the ceremonial law, but by obedience to the moral law. But it was a *religious* demand as well as a moral demand. It begins as a demand for heart-religion, a spiritual assent, and not a mere formal renunciation of idols. "Thou shalt have none other gods before Me," claiming thus inward submission, the adoring worship of the heart. They must give Him undivided allegiance. They must turn their hearts from all false gods, and walk in the way of His commandments. Jehovah demands from them exclusive regard, and this because He comes to them as a spiritual being. Hence the prohibition of image-worship. The revelation of God as spirit implies the exclusion of all the degrading superstitions of idolatry. The exclusiveness is also the natural and inevitable demand of love. There is a true and right jealousy of love, though the word and the idea have been debased by our usage. It has most unholy associations in our minds, but it is a

quality of the purest love nevertheless. Complete love asks for complete return. It cannot brook rivalry. And God's love, being perfect and infinite, makes demands for exclusive regard impossible to any human love. Because Jehovah loves Israel, He will not have a rival on the throne of their hearts. "I am Jehovah thy God"—"Thou shalt have none other gods before Me."

The history of revelation is the history of the relationship between God and man, fitly pictured under the figure of a covenant; and so the revelation of God in Christ is spoken of as the new covenant, a nearer, sweeter relationship. The terms of the covenant are the same as those of the covenant at Horeb, only of richer content. He is the Lord our Redeemer who delivered us from the house of bondage, who has shown Himself in the face of Jesus Christ as our Heavenly Father, condescending to men, displaying the miracle of divine sacrifice, redeeming us at the jeopardy of blood, loving us with an everlasting love. Of His wondrous grace He stoops to enter into a covenant, taking us, unworthy, into the sweep of His loving purpose, walking with us in loving fellowship through this great wilderness. Need I pile up words to describe to you this blessed covenant-relationship in which you of His grace

stand towards God? Your souls saved from the burden of sin know it: your glad hearts rejoicing in some measure of communion know it. As ever it is a covenant of love and mercy, a love that went to death, that paid the price of blood. It is the love of God: behold what manner of love!

This sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a symbol of the covenant-relationship by which God has met man and entered into fellowship with him in Jesus Christ. We celebrate the deathless love of the dying Saviour. He sealed the covenant with His own blood. The sign of the covenant is the sign of the cross. We take the bread and the wine (as Moses and the Israelites took the two tablets of stone) as first of all evidence of the covenant which God has made with us, as tangible tokens by which we represent to ourselves the fact of God's eternal love, by which we say to ourselves that God loves us, loves us to death (witness the broken bread and the poured out wine!). In these tokens He says to us, "I am the Lord thy God." When we take the bread and the wine and recall to our mind what they stand for in our Saviour's life and death, could we have stronger witness that God has made a covenant with us and has pledged Himself to us and said, "I am the Lord thy God, thy Redeemer"?

That is the one side of the covenant. The other side, as at Horeb, carries with it conditions, and along the same two lines of morality and religion. (1) For us too the covenant has a *moral* basis, and implies that our lives will assimilate towards the character of the God we worship. We are set to the task to become like Him, to be holy as He is holy, to keep His commandments, and to do His will. The moral conditions of the covenant-relationship insisted on in the Old Testament are still essential. "If a man love Me," said Jesus, "he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The condition of communion is the keeping of His words, just as the condition of the old covenant was the keeping of the commandments. If God is to be our God, we must be His people, and His people means a consecrate people. It is not necessary to insist on this aspect of the covenant, namely the moral obligation it carries, to people who have seen the grace and truth of the Master, and had any vision of the beauty of His holiness. (2) Further, here as at Horeb, the root of the human side of the contract is *spiritual*, inward submission, the adoring worship of the heart. The response to "I am the Lord thy God" is the conclusion, "Thou shalt have

none other gods beside Me." To His love we give love. To His giving we give ourselves. He claims undivided allegiance, exclusive regard. The divine jealousy will not brook rivalry. Jehovah cannot consort with idols. God cannot consort with Mammon. Jesus stands outside the door till He has full entrance and undivided possession. He must have a regal place or none at all. He can only accept the throne of the heart. The early Christians would have been tolerated by Rome if they would have been content to allow their Saviour to have a place in the Pantheon among the other pagan deities. But about this there could be no compromise. From the very nature of the case it was so. Because it was a spiritual religion, He could accept no partial sovereignty. Besides, such love as His demands complete love in return. His religion cannot be a matter of preference, but a passion. He will not receive half-hearted disciples, with one eye on the kingdom and another back to the world. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." It is because His love is infinite, that it comes with such infinite claims. It is to insult Him to offer a little bit of our hearts, to present a scant measure of love to Him, who has poured such full measure into our cup of life, who has loved us and given Him-

self for us. Is it not our reasonable service? He will not compete with your idols. The Saviour must be King, or He cannot even be Saviour. Is it not reasonable that we should so love Him who first loved us? There is no safety for us till we love Him with all our heart and all our mind and all our soul. Before they are perfected, our love must become passion, and our service must become devotion. To-day, when we in symbol eat of His body broken for us, and drink of His blood shed for us, do we not understand how He must claim complete possession of us till beside His love all else seems as hatred in comparison? The covenant is imperfect till in response to "I am the Lord thy Redeemer," the answer comes sincerely, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that we love Thee. Beside Thee there is no other god, no other idol, in our hearts."

## XXX

## THE APPEAL OF THE PAST

*Thus saith the Lord: I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord.*—JEREMIAH ii. 2.

A FAVOURITE prophetic figure, common in Jeremiah and other prophets, is that which speaks of Israel as the bride of God. It is a beautiful thought, that God had married Israel, claimed her exclusively as His, honouring her with a great love, and sealing her to Himself, making her the pure bride of Heaven. The figure is delicately touched in this fine verse which recalls the early call of Israel. So all idolatry, in keeping with the same figure, is as the breaking of the marriage bond, a wilful and scandalous unfaithfulness, the nation deserting the true God who is as a husband unto her with all the rights of love and of law.

In the name of God, Jeremiah solemnly charges the nation with infidelity. In turning to idols and the lower worship of idolatry, she is defiling herself

with unworthy lovers. Jeremiah here contrasts Israel's infidelity with God's faithfulness "I remember," is Jehovah's lament, recalling in fond memory His choice of her and delight in her. The prophet also contrasts Israel's present infidelity with her past faithfulness, as seen idealised through the mists of history. "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." Israel with all her faults had a great and noble past. To memory it is very beautiful—even to God. The early Israel was not perfect; none knew better than the prophet how imperfect it was. Then, too, were rebellions and back-slidings, and murmurings even in the wilderness. Still, their history is a record of greatness. With all the faults and failures revealed in the early story of the nation, there must have been a whole-hearted and generous heroism. Only the good is thought of, even God will only think of the good, the self-sacrificing faith, the ardour of a strong, simple love, the great choice of the wilderness instead of the flesh-pots of Egypt. God's love brooded over the youth of their race; and they had responded sincerely. They clave to God, and went out like their father Abraham, not knowing whither they went, but strong in faith because they

were assured they went with God. It is the ideal past of pious Jewish thought, the time when God called them and they gladly obeyed, the time when God and the nation were on intimate terms, when Israel felt herself a glad and proud bride.

It is God's love which is here first of all emphasised rather than Israel's. He recalls to them His kindness and gracious condescension and the love which made Him espouse them. He would soften them with the thought of it, remind them of His watchful, sleepless love, and make them feel ashamed of their heartless desertion of Him now. But they too had once been faithful to Him in the kindness and glory of youth, in the love of the first espousals. "Israel was holiness unto the Lord," consecrated to Him, "the first fruits of His increase," and so protected by Him in loving care from all enemies. But alas! this idyllic relation is broken; the strong religious bond no longer unites Israel to God. The failure is not on God's part. "Thus saith the Lord, what iniquity have your fathers found in Me that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after other gods—vanity?" Idolatry is vanity, emptiness; for to the strong religious sense of a prophet idols were nothing, a ghastly simulacrum of the reality.

The folly of it oppresses the prophet. The shame

of Israel's infidelity is increased by the thought of the poor choice they made. The insult to God might have been less if the new object of their love were more worthy. They might at least have given Him a fitter rival! There is fierce scorn and contemptuous sarcasm in the way the prophet speaks of this. To desert God, the bride's first love with His kiss of the espousals warm on her cheek, was a crime; but to desert Him for this was also a shame, a lasting disgrace. It is insult added to injury. The lover in Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* breaks out into scorn, not so much at his desertion as at his desertion for such a poor unworthy rival, a clown whose grossness of nature will drag her down, and sings of the folly of choosing a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart than his. If she must be false, there would not be so much pain had she chosen a higher and a better. He would at least have been saved from the sting of insult and the sense of shame on her behalf. How much more is the feeling of scorn to a clear-seeing soul like Jeremiah for what is to him an infinitely more foolish and disgraceful choice! He can almost laugh with bitterness at the contrast. For the bride of God to desert Him—for what? So contemptible does it seem to him to turn from the pure spiritual worship of the living God to the de-

grading rites of idolatry, nay, so astounding, that he would expect to see the very heavens frown and the skies laugh with mocking irony, "Be ye astonished, oh ye heavens, at this." He even contrasts Israel's infidelity with heathen faithfulness to their false gods. "Hath a heathen nation changed their gods though they are no-gods, but My people have changed their glory for that which profiteth not." It is terrible blindness which does not see the highest, which cannot see the best. The insanity of the choice weighs on the prophet's heart. To choose the palpably lower seems such incredible folly.

Yet what common folly it is! Is there no counterpart of that folly in our own lives? Are any of us at this very time turning our hearts towards a lower ideal which we confess in our sane moments to be lower, choosing the part which our conscience tells us to be not the better part? Are any of us giving up the highest because it is too high, shutting our eyes to the light that would lead us upward and our ears to the manifest call of God? Are we letting in business and pleasure and all worldly and selfish thoughts and aims and ambitions, and shutting out Christ? Are none of us to-day making the great refusal? The tragedy, so like a farce, that was played before Jeremiah's eyes, is it not repeated

again and again? The folly at which he stood aghast, is it not enacted daily in our midst?

Some can remember a kindness of youth, an early love and faith, an early committal, an early plighting of troth, an early heroism that chose the wilderness if need be. It is bad enough never to have known the high, to have known only the lower and to be placidly content with it. But to have known it even once; to have been drawn to it in desire and decision, and now to fall supinely back too feeble to aspire; to shut yourself out at last from that richer life and purer heart and sweeter love once possible, and all for the lower gratification of the lower self—that is hell. You can never quite forget the truer past. Sometimes you must remember the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, "and an eye shall vex thee looking ancient kindness on thy pain."

Memory is one of the good angels of God recalling the past in the ethical interests of the present and the future. Sometimes it works through the failures and mistakes and follies and sins of other days, working in us shame and humility and repentance. How can we be proud or vainglorious or self-sufficient, when at a touch pages of the written book can be turned back to disclose to us what we were or did? Memory is repentance, and repent-

ance is a gate of life. Sometimes it works on other lines, not by a recollection of past failure and sin, but by a recollection of past faith and love and joy and peace. It reminds us of the kindness of youth and the love of early days and the first high thoughts and noble passions. We can be touched as truly and profoundly by the recollection of goodness, by seeing ourselves again in the mirror of the past as we were at our best. The contrast can move us, as the prophet sought to move Israel by that picture of their devotion when Israel was holiness unto the Lord.

God appeals to us as a nation by our past, by every noble struggle and every hard-won victory, by all that our fathers have won for us of liberty, by the standard that has been set to us, by every possession, material and intellectual and moral and spiritual, which we have inherited. It is all a call to prove ourselves worthy of a great vocation and be not recreant and craven successors. The appeal of the past comes to us also as a Church, by the Christian centuries, by all the way through which the Church has been led, by the devotion and sacrifice and faith and love and tears and blood of all the saints. Every story of grace is a new appeal to us, to feel ourselves in the succession. Surely also God appeals to us as individuals by our past. He reminds us of

His goodness and grace and love. There is perhaps a paradise lying behind us; the memory of a happy childhood it may be, the patience and care and love and regard of parents and friends and teachers; or it may be the recollection of innocence, turning back the page to the time when we looked out on life with pure eyes and unselfish thought, the remembrance of sweet child-like faith and the strong calm power of loving. He would soften us by the memory. It is there, somewhere in that past, an appeal which moves the heart by the very contrast. It may be a time of decision when we too came to terms with God and we knew ourselves to be in a loving relationship to Him, when we plighted our troth, and knew something of the joy expressed in the prophet's daring figure "of the love of the espousals" when the soul was held in the thrilling of God's arm. Is there in our past a sacred spot made holy to memory by holy associations, made noble by a noble aspiration, made pure by a pure resolve, made beautiful by the entrance into the heart and life of the King Himself in His beauty?

The offence of idolatry by the Jews was a thousand times worse than the heathen's offence, for it was *apostasy;* it was as the shameful breach of the marriage vow. To rightly appreciate our own situation

with regard to the past and all God's gracious love revealed in it, we need to use the same prophetic figures and to put something of the same moral passion into the words. When we have looked back to that sacred spot in our past, we have to ask ourselves with something of the same indignation, turning the edge of the irony to our own hearts, will we commit the folly, the glaring infidelity, the terrible apostasy of denying that sacred past? Will we harden our hearts as the sweet thought of it comes back to us? One of the deadliest sins of middle life and of age is irreverence of the dreams of youth, sneering at early piety or early earnestness, declaring that then we were ignorant and foolish and full of impossible ideals, but that now we have seen more of life and know the world, and are too wise ever again to be entrapped into high feeling or burning zeal or self-forgetful devotion. It is a low deep when a man so views the past; for he is hardening his heart against its appeal.

If God remembers, shall we forget? If God recalls to us some such time of early faith and decision, shall we not use the memory to dower our life again with a new obedience? If God reminds us of the kindness of our youth, the love of our espousals, when we fell in love with His will and lost our hearts

to His life, when in the passion of a great resolve we counted all things but loss that we might gain Him, and were willing to follow Christ into the wilderness if He would but bless us with a look of love, will we not use this revived recollection as a new opportunity, and turn to Him again, and once more espouse ourselves in glad and full surrender?

O my soul, if God remembers for thee the love of thine espousals, shalt thou forget?

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